A SOCIOLINGUISTICS STUDY OF READING DIFFICULTIES AMONG NATIONAL AND HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA STUDENTS OF KADUNA POLYTECHNIC

BY

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ARTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of a bibliography.

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Date: 25-3-1999

DIGITIZED

CERTIFICATION

This Thesis entitled "A Sociolinguistic Study of Reading Difficulties Among National and Higher National Students of Kaduna Polytechnic" by **Eunice Aduke Ade-ojo,** meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in English Language of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and Literary Presentation.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to : My dear husband, Moses Idowu Ade-ojo and our lovely children, Ronke, Segun, Nike, Lola and Kayode who have given me their unconditional love and support all through.

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to assess the reading difficulties among students of kaduna Polytechnic which is used as a case study. It focuses on National and Higher National Diploma Students. The importance of reading, especially in the learning process, needs no emphasis as it is an indispensable tool for any effective learning.

Three factors are used to carry out (his study - the background knowledge of the students, the reading text and the reader's intent. The study identifies the Students reading difficulties, examines their causative factors and also proposes how the difficulties would be removed.

For the realization of these objectives, four main instruments were used for data collection. The background questionnaire was made of 22 questions - both close and open- ended designed to gather socio-linguistic information on the target population. The teachers' questionnaire was aimed at detecting further where the difficulties were and their remedies.

The cloze and vocabulary tests were designed to identify the degree of the students' difficulties. The data were analysed in percentages and

represented in questions and tables.

Our findings reveal that the students have a lot of reading problems. More fundamentally, this study finds out that as a result of the students' difficulties, interest for reading is totally lacking. The study concludes that the existence of the numerous difficulties constitutes a serious obstacle to the students' learning and is responsible, if not wholly, at least in part, for the continuing downward slide in the standard of education. Suggestions are, therefore, made with regard to how students' reading difficulties could possibly be redressed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 READING SKILL

Among the four language or communication skills, reading appears to occupy a prominent position. Reading is a skill that bears relevance to every facet of human endeavour. Reading is, therefore, a habit that should be cultivated if one must function properly in modern society, but unfortunately, one hardly considers either the purpose or processes involved. Reading activity is taken for granted much as one does with listening and speaking, less so, perhaps in the case of writing.

Certainly, there are poor readers, even non-readers, in literate societies. The reason for this is not far fetched: many people find reading very difficult and this does not encourage them at all. A society would have more evidence of its past recorded if it is written rather than through oral traditions which may be distorted with time. Furthermore, inability to read can prevent people from participating in the affairs of their society thereby making them socio-economically, politically and even educationally dis-advantaged.

Indeed, the main goal of education over the years has been to teach people how to read and thus acquire the writing system of their culture, to inculcate in them the realisation of the fact that language is the chief means of transmitting cultures from one generation to another.

Besides, reading is the foundation upon which man's intellectual progress has been based in his role as a worker, student and citizen. *Catherine Wallace* (1992:5) says that "urban technological societies operate on the premise that their members can read." Reading ability is required for practical tasks of comprehending street names, locating telephone numbers in a directory, preparing tax forms and many other common-place activities that are taken for granted, as well as the acquisition of information and understanding the tasks of business and government.

Reading passages, whether in the students' course books or extracted from other sources for their use, are indispensable to the acquisition of competence in English Language. It is only through reading that students acquire the skills and speeds they would need for practical purposes when they leave school. Education depends on the quantity and quality of reading that is done. All the important study skills require quick, efficient and imaginative reading. The more one reads, the more background knowledge one acquires of other ways of life, behaviour and thought, also, the more one understands the books one reads. This explain why most of the language books in English, Yoruba, Igbo and French give prominent places to reading passages right from the primary school.

Reading ability would continue to remain a useful way of showing a nation's level of literacy. The inability to read perfectly causes the resultant failure among people to tackle any printed text which offers them a challenge and this disability manifests at all levels of

the educational system even up to the universities where handouts are preferred to books. In fact, many of the leaders in the society do not have the intellectual discipline and skill to read beyond one page of the various documents they need to personally peruse each day. Some simply leave them to aides to read and interpret. In fact, if one carefully listens to how some speeches are read and the way sentences, phrases and thought processes are disjointedly juxtaposed, one instantly realises that such people do not understand what they read. Too frequently, even the educated have considerable difficulty in expressing their ideas in language appropriate to abstract thought.

This is exacerbated by the general disinterest in reading. To be disabled in reading is like going through a mine field blindfolded. The ability to read effectively gives the student a certain leverage over others because the whole world becomes a place where they can tread without fear. For all readers, the experience of reading provides an opportunity to explore and relate to a wider world than one's own. In this sense, reading extends the social, cultural and academic horizons.

1.2 PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL AND HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA STUDENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

A lot of efforts have been and are still being committed to the National and Higher National Diploma programme to ensure its success and guarantee full realisation of its goals. However, the results over the years do not justify the efforts put into the programme. There

has been a generally low level of performance of the students especially in English Language. Since students spend about four-fifths of the school day in content subjects, their linguistic competence is likely to be influenced by the way reading is done. Therefore, the extent to which reading contributes to poor performance of these students cannot be overemphasised. In fact, the performance of these students gives a lot of concern to their English teachers because of the difficulties they all seem to have in reading.

Anytime tests are given on reading, the performance is always below expectation and without the ability to read and comprehend, there is little they can do successfully in other subjects. Reading is important at their level where the system normally places a high premium on the students' ability to extend their knowledge independently of their teachers. This means that all students should be or are expected to be efficient readers and since the reading is not in their first language or mother tongue, they require a level of reading competence that is akin to the level of an educated native reader.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students, especially those in higher institutions of learning have the problem of how to get through the vast amount of reading given for each course. Some of these students feel that there is just not enough time available for them to sit down and read everything word by word, line by line. They feel it takes too long and that it is necessary for them to acquire a technique that would allow them to cover whole pages of text without having to read every

single word. It appears from observation that the reading habit of both National and Higher National Diploma Students of Kaduna Polytechnic does not conform with the standard expected at their level. They only manage to develop strategies which compensate, in part, for minimal reading ability . Such strategies which they develop include a kind of rapid reading which is often used to get the gist or main idea of a passage. They read just to find out what the passage is generally about. Comprehension is not at its maximum in this type of reading. This seems to create problems or difficulties which hinder self-reliant developmental process.

If there is one problem militating against the success of these students in examinations and which has been grossly neglected over the years, it is their deficiency in the different language skills, especially in reading. Some of the students get to the Polytechnic with the false notion that the communication skills acquired at the secondary level are enough to get them through their academic work at the tertiary level. In addition, because of the nature of the Programmes offered at these levels (National and Higher National Diploma), it has been realised that it is in the polytechnics some of them have their first serious encounter with the use of reading skill.

Reading plays an important role in a student's life. Without reading, a student would find it difficult to conform to the norms of the society and would also not perform well in all their subjects. A very strong motivation for this study, therefore, is the fact that if the reading difficulties of these students are combatted, their performance in English and other subject

areas would improve because the reading difficulties have a lot of impact on their performance. Therefore, this study has set out to try as much as possible to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reading difficulties confronting the National Diploma and higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic?
2. What are the socio-linguistic factors responsible for these difficulties?
3. Are the reading difficulties reading problems or language problems among these students?
4. How would these difficulties be overcome among these students for better comprehension and performance?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Reading is an important aspect of communication skills, therefore, for one to be fluent in day to day communication, reading must not be looked down upon. A learner, particularly at the higher rungs of the educational ladder, has to read text-books, journals, periodicals and many other references available to him . In addition, he has to be able to locate needed facts and independently grow acquainted with vast store-houses of information on his every subject. A reading proficiency is often seen as an index of a learner's intellectual competence. A disabled reader, regardless of his general aptitude, is handicapped in other subjects on the school curriculum.

This study is intended to assist the authorities of Kaduna Polytechnic to know the reading

difficulties confronting National and Higher National Diploma students of the institution, sources of the difficulties and also give suggestions as to what can be done to correct or at least minimise the impact of the difficulties. Through this, it is hoped that the findings would provide necessary information to institutions running similar programmes. Finally, it is hoped that the study would provide impetus for educational planners and administrators to take appropriate steps in providing effective training programmes that would enhance the students' reading ability in order to attain the national goals for such a programme.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is focussed on National and Higher National Diploma students drawn from the four colleges that comprise the Kaduna Polytechnic. It is at this level (National Diploma) that the difficulties manifest most because all the departments in the institution have "use of English" as one of the compulsory courses that must be offered by all students. Therefore, the National Diploma and Higher National Diploma levels are the most appropriate for this type of study.

It is generally believed that comprehension is the ability to mouth printed symbols correctly and know the literal meaning of the words in the text. These are not enough because the reader has to possess the concept or ideas associated with such symbols. This study, therefore, intends to focus on the students' problem of uncritical reading behaviour which manifests in their inability to read between the lines, to exercise critical judgement over what is read and how this has culminated in their lack of reading interest.

academics. A good language programme produces a well developed individual capable of comprehending, speaking, reading and writing.

Oruma (1989) further define literacy in terms of ability to read and write. It would therefore, seem from the institutionalised collocation in which "read" always precedes "write" in the definition of literacy that enormous importance is attached to the primacy of reading in the galaxy of language skills. An examination of the act of reading and the basic skills and abilities which must be possessed in order to effectively cope with any and all types of reading materials is fundamental to an analysis of elements common to all reading.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several definitions have been proferred by various authorities for the act of reading over the years. According to ***Widdowson*** (1979: 25), reading is the process of getting linguistic information via print. This definition is too general and all-embracing to be of much practical value. This is because there are many different kinds of information and so many purposes for reading that a general definition is in danger of being trivial or banal.

Frank Smith (1985 : 19) asserts that there is no point in looking for a simple definition of "reading". According to him, reading has a multiplicity of meanings. He says since the meaning of the word on any particular occasion will depend largely on the context in which it occurs, one should therefore not expect that a single definition for reading will be found.

This view is also expressed by *Alderson* (1984 :16) when he says that in most contexts, it would seem very necessary to specify what sort of reading is being considered and for what purpose. According to *Tiffen* (1969 : 27), the object of reading is to get meaning from the printed page. "From the above definitions, it could be seen that reading is indeed a complex activity. Nevertheless this study views reading as the ability to unlock the sound symbol code of the language, to interpret meanings for various purposes and to do so enthusiastically. The efficient reader must be capable of interpreting ideas through the use of symbols representing sounds and ideas.

Many researchers have done a lot of work on the importance and difficulties of reading. In this study therefore, some of these contributions would be looked into".

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

The main goal of education over the years has been to teach people how to read and thus acquire the writing system of the language of their culture, perhaps, in the realisation of the fact that reading is the chief means of transmitting cultures from one generation to another. *Lilian Gray* and *Dora Reese* (1957 : 12) talk extensively on the importance of reading. They outline the general importance of reading thus:

i. An aid in meeting needs

ii. A tool for vocation

iii. A pursuit for leisure time

Kashim Ibrahim Library
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria Nigeria

iv. An aid to enrichment of experience

v. A tool of citizenship

vi. A source of spiritual refreshment

Lilian and Dora believe that as an aid in meeting needs, reading is of constant importance when it comes to the solution of problems connected with daily living. As a tool for vocation, people today must stay informed about the newest development in their fields. In the majority of cases, people can only secure much of such such information through reading.

On the importance of reading generally, Lilian *et al* (1957) assert that adults who maintain that they never read forget that ability to get meaning from prints is an integral part of their lives. It is hard for anyone to get anywhere or achieve anything in our complex civilisation without the ability to read. This is true in our society today where life is organised in such a way that it is impossible to live effectively beyond the years of early childhood without reading.

For enrichment of experience, they say that reading expands the personal horizon. If the individual reads on a great variety of topics, he can participate when opinions are expressed in widely separated fields. Myriads of new interests can be stimulated by reading. Also as a source of spiritual refreshment, the fact expressed is that many find a ready source of spiritual refreshment in religious reading. According to *Edward Fry* (1963), reading is one of the ways in which someone who has left school remains educated. He further asserts that

anyone who never reads after leaving school can hardly be considered an educated person. In her own opinion, ***Mary Finocchiaro*** (1959), is of the opinion that the importance of reading when she says that reading is not only important in the sense that learning in other subject areas involves reading, but the ability to read all types of material with comprehension, ease and enjoyment will contribute to self-realisation and increase personal social adjustment of readers.

Williams J.D. (1962 : 14), points out that as we start reading, a door opens into a new world, a world of our imagination, helped by the words of the writer. He explains further when he says that it is as if we are on a magic carpet and we travel with the speed of thoughts to the remote corners of the earth, to distant times, to share with the people we meet in the book the exciting things that happen to them. He says if one has not yet discovered the enjoyment of reading, he/she is missing one of the great enjoyments in life. To him, the man who loves reading is never bored, is never at loss for something to do at any moment of leisure time.

Reading for leisure is an activity that many students of our institutions of higher learning find difficult to practise. To them, reading outside their recommended text-books and classnotes is a waste of time. From the already stated importance of reading, it is clear that reading is equally important as a social force. It is certainly a means of enjoying leisure and sharing vicarious experiences. Such recreational reading enables the reader to meet real and imaginary people and to experience events forever denied the non-reader. This helps in the achievement of emotional stability and the development of the various attributes of the

human personality like courage, fortitude and perseverance.

Thurndike (1917 : 323-332), sees reading as a form of reasoning and argues that understanding a paragraph is like solving a problem in mathematics since the mind is assailed as it were by every word in the paragraph. What this means is that the ability to read well is one of the most valuable skills that could be acquired particularly at the vocational and technical levels.

Reading is also a means of developing and reinforcing other language skills. For instance, writing skill can be tremendously improved and boosted by wide reading. Through reading, one does not only gain new ideas and concepts but is also exposed to the styles of experienced writers by which he can be greatly influenced. On the whole, the importance of reading to man in his various roles has been encapsulated by the Halves World Encyclopedia vol 18 (Page 3359) when on the future of reading, it asserts that "Our level of civilisation cannot be maintained without reading, without the printed word as a medium for conveying information. Literacy is both a necessary and sufficient foundation for a life time's education... there are few other exclusively human attributes that combine such practical uses with such potential for pleasure."

Talking on reading as a tool of citizenship, ***Gray et al*** (1957), regard reading as an essential tool of citizenship as it stimulates the ability to think and enlarge the readers' social and

political competence. They further say that in a democracy, each citizen must inform himself on issues and problems. They are of the opinion that reading is perhaps better for this than television or radio since if the citizen has not clearly understood the explanation of an issue during the first exposure, he has the opportunity to re-read it.

Unoh (1972), mentions that proficiency in reading has been found to be closely related to school success. The fast, accurate reader, he says possesses a valuable tool that lays open to him vast house store of knowledge that lies between the covers of books while on the other hand, the poor reader either reads so slowly that he has not got time to read much or reads so accurately in that he is little better off when he has finished than when he started.

In his pamphlet, ***Mini O. Hagan*** (1981), points out that most people do not perfect their reading after the upper-primary level and that high school or college students are often bad readers because they look over the need to continually use and improve good reading habits. He further points out that the eyes, like fingers for the piano or legs for skinning must be trained to be skillful. He further emphasises that reading helps to improve one's vocabulary and the ability to communicate effectively.

In a feature article, ***Therese Nweke*** (1996:14), emphasises the importance of being able to read when she says that "a number of employers say they are primarily losing money because of the increasing inability of employees to read... (and)... another company

suffered the loss of half - a - day's production because a factory worker mis-read the instructions in a new operating manual". She further says that statistics indicate that twenty one-year-old men who cannot read or write or can barely do so are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed. In the article, Nweke further says that businessmen also point to the fact that a worker who is a fluent reader can scan instructions and then read them in detail; and workers who are not fluent readers cannot do this, as they either do not get to the end, or miss out the vital step which tells them what to do.

To read efficiently, all the skills and sub-skills involved in the reading process must be adequately developed. Reading is, therefore, an opportunity for working on such skills. ***Barret*** (1968), distinguishes five different reading skills namely literal comprehension, re-organisation of the ideas in the text, inferential ability, evaluation and appreciation.

In his own contribution to the discussion of reading skills, ***Grellet*** (1981 : 4), mentions the following reading skills - recognising the script of a language, understanding explicitly stated information, understanding conceptual meaning, interpreting texts by going outside it, identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse etc. ***Widdowson*** (1979), on his own part, opines that the assertion of the sub-skills is based on the assumption that texts have predictable meanings which can be extracted if only the reader is sufficiently skillful. He says that text does not have meaning but potential for meaning which will vary from reader to reader-depending upon a multitude of factors. This view suggests

that meaning itself is in people and not in words. People interpret differently.

According to ***Ola-Ofe*** (1991), skimming and scanning are two related reading skills that are useful for academic purposes. Skimming involves reading something very quickly just to find out what it is generally about. In this way, the text is not read in detail but with high speed to capture its essential points. Scanning, on the other hand, is a type of speed reading technique which is used when one wants to locate a particular piece of information.

Grellet (1981 : 6), further says that reading is an active skill because it constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. Secondly, it has communicative function. In addition to reading skill, Christine Nutall (1982), says that the aim of intensive reading is to arrive at a profound and detailed understanding of the text; not only of what it means but also of how the meaning is produced.

In the area of reading difficulties, ***Mcgregor*** (1971), observes that because of the effects of reading in the primary school, which few teachers in the secondary school try to remedy in pupils, pupils reach the school certificate class without any reading skills. This was confirmed in a test he conducted on reading speed in an African University among second year students in a class of thirty-four. The average reading speed in the class was one hundred and sixty five words per minute. Only one student achieved one hundred and thirty words per minute and had therefore obviously not improved her reading speed at all since

the early primary school days.

Bir Singh (1979), points out the fact that slow, word by word readers often understand little of what they read and miss much of the joy of reading and that fast readers comprehend more than slow readers. He further says that body movement and sub-vocalisation help neither speed nor comprehension of reading because some readers turn their heads from one side to the other, point at words in a line with a finger or pencil, move their lips and say the words to themselves. These, according to him, are all bad habits that impede good reading.

Slow reading is symptomised in the tendency to read word by word and this slows down comprehension rate. This is because thoughts are not communicated in words but in sequence of words and the grammatical relationship between them. Reading word by word makes it difficult for a reader to grasp the message conveyed because by the time his snail speed gets him to the last word of a sentence, he will not only have forgotten what the first is, but also lost contact with the relationship between the words. Reading word by word is doubly inefficient because it not only makes reading slow and laborious in itself, it also hinders efficient comprehension.

Some researchers also support the view that reading in a language which is not their readers' first language is a source of considerable difficulty. In discussing this, Mac Namara (1970), said he found that the Irish English bilingual readers he studied were reading in their weaker

language (in this case, Irish) at a slower rate and with lower comprehension than readers reading in their first language. Besides taking considerably longer to read their second language, readers who understand the words and structures of the texts under study were still unable to understand what they read in the second language as well as in their first language. This shows that reading in a foreign language is not simply a problem of knowing the words and the grammar of the language, there are other causes of the difficulties readers experience. Many people have asserted that the reason some readers cannot read adequately in English is that they cannot read adequately in their native language in the first place. If only, so the argument goes, they had learned to read properly in their first language, the problems of reading in English would have been vastly reduced.

On whether reading difficulty is caused by reading or language problem, *Jolly* (1978), claimed that success in reading a foreign language depends crucially upon one's first language reading ability rather than upon the reader's level of English. He says that reading in a foreign language requires the transference of old skills, not the learning of new ones. It would follow from this view that readers who fail to read adequately in the foreign language fail because they either do not possess the "old skills" or because they have failed to transfer them.

This view is shared by *Coady* (1979), who asserts that foreign language reading is a reading problem and not that of language. This is further supported by "Reading Universals

Hypothesis" put forward by ***Gooman*** (1973), who claims that the reading process will be much the same for all languages. ***Pat Rigg*** (1977), using miscue analysis, found considerable similarities in reading miscues for English as foreign language readers from a variety of different language backgrounds. If the reading process is the same or very similar in all languages, then one would expect reading ability to transfer across languages. ***Clarke*** (1979), says that if the reading process is basically the same in all languages we would logically expect good readers to maintain their advantage over poor readers in the second language.

In his own opinion, ***Yorio*** (1971), says that the reading problems of foreign language readers are due to imperfect knowledge of the language and to native language interference in the reading process. He subscribes to Goodman's view of the reading process as involving the reader, guarded by his knowledge of the native language. Yorio is of the opinion that reading involves four factors: knowledge of the language, ability to predict or guess in order to make the correct choices, ability to remember the previous cues and ability to make the necessary associations between the different cues that have been selected. According to him, the process is made more considerably complex for the foreign reader because of what he calls "new elements". These new elements can be summarised as interference from the native language and inadequate knowledge of the target language.

A very close opinion to that of Yorio in connection with what reading involves and what can

be the possible causes of difficulties, is the opinion of ***James M. Royer et al*** (1984), who views intent as a very important element in reading comprehension. This means that having a purpose for reading helps in the comprehension as it gives a better understanding.

Some research evidence from studies of bilingualism suggests the transferability of reading ability across languages. Such transferability has lent support to the view that poor reading in a foreign language is essentially a reading problem. The studies of ***Barrera-Vasquet*** (1953), and ***Modiano*** (1966), seem to show that reading in the first language will result in eventual improved reading ability in the second language when compared with those who first learned to read in their second language.

However, some Canadian studies have shown that children taught to read initially in a second language (in this case French) eventually do well in reading in their first language (English) as do Monolingual speakers of that language. In their studies, ***(Barik and Swain*** 1975), children of English- speaking parents were taught in French immersion Programmes where all school subjects were taught in the second language (French). The readers in the French Immersion programmes were eventually able to display equivalent subject achievement comparable to monolingual controls, despite having been taught in a second language. The studies went further to show that not only, as expected, were their reading and spoken communicative abilities in the second language far superior to the control group but also perhaps more unexpectedly, the immersion group did not show any disadvantage

vis-a-vis the control group in reading ability in their first language, an ability which had not been directly taught in school. From these studies, it could be seen that transfer of first language influence is undeniable-the Mexican Indian was able to transfer his first language reading ability to the second language reading task just as the French Canadian Immersion children were able to transfer the strategies learned in the second language back into their first language.

One would expect then that readers who were good in their first language would have a better chance of becoming good readers in their second language than readers who were poor in their first language.

Alderson, Bastien and Madrazo (1977), in their own study, provide evidence which suggests that a reader's knowledge of the foreign language is more important to the comprehension of foreign language texts than his reading ability in the first language. Their study concluded that the best predictor of reading ability in a foreign language was not reading ability in the mother tongue but rather proficiency in the foreign language.

This study would not dwell much on this since it is not a study carried out mainly on bilingualism. Nevertheless, the reading problem, as suggested by these studies, appear to be both a language problem and a reading problem.

Some researchers view reading difficulty as having some connection with the reader's cultural or social background or knowledge. ***Fries*** (1945), says that comprehension of the total meaning of a sentence occurs only when the linguistic meaning of the sentence is fitted into a social framework of organised information. For mastery of a foreign language, he argues that one must find some substitute for the kind of background knowledge he has in his own language. One position that has been adopted by Margaret Steffensen *et al* is that there will be cultural interference at the affective level, in the connotative values of words and in the attitudes expressed in, and underlying the passage. A second is that there will be interference at the denotative level as well and readers must have a rather complete understanding of the background information if there is to be complete comprehension of a text. At the affective level, ***Wilga and Rivers*** (1968), identify differences in values and attitudes as one of the main sources of reading problems in a foreign language.

However, social and cultural meaning is still described as an affective dimension and a great deal of reading performance is attributed to knowledge of vocabulary. ***Paulston and Bruder*** (1976), anticipate greater interference from cultural knowledge. This is in agreement with Goodman (1973), who is of the opinion that the proficient reader must draw on his experiential conceptual background in order to supply a semantic component to the message. They both conclude that reading is easier when the cultural background is familiar and readers can draw on cultural information in the decoding process.

In her own opinion, of what might be some contributory factors to reading difficulties, *Catherine Wallace* (1992 : 19), discusses the fact that some socio linguistic factors cause reading difficulties. These factors are both in the immediate communicative situation between reader and writer and in the wider institutional and socio-cultural context. She says that it is not just psychological, cognitive or affective factors which influence one's interpretation of texts but social ones. She further says that readers share ways of interpreting texts with those of a similar social class or ethnic group, or of similar religious and political beliefs. To her, the reading difficulties would not be the same because readers have multiple social identities. In the case of the interaction between reader and writer, it appears as if writers take for granted that their readers are in possession of certain kinds of knowledge of the world. They make very broad assumptions about the kind of things that would not be perceived as problematic by their readers. In order words, writers take for granted that readers would be able to call up particular schemas. She argues that readers are also classified in more specific ways by mass producers of written materials such as book publishers and magazine and newspaper editors. Titles of publications often explicitly address specific readership groups, for example, titles like "Maxism Today"', "New Civil Engineers", "Woman" etc. If one is not one of the group of intended readers, the effect, when reading one of these publications, she says, is of eaves- dropping on a dialogue between the writer and his imagined reader(s).

Wallace (1992), says further that differing background knowledge and cultural assumptions

could make it difficult to interpret texts in a way which corresponds with the writers' schema. Moreover, readers are not simply categorised as members of social groups but "positioned" that is, invited to concur with the beliefs and world view of the producer of the text as indicated by the dominant discourses within it.

In discussing the role of syntactic problems encountered by readers in reading foreign language texts, ***Ruth Berman*** (1984:139) assets that "the aim of reading is to reach a point where readers understand both the meaning of words and how they inter-relate within a given text". She says that in her opinion, the unravelling of parts of sentences and correct perception of their grammatical and rhetorical inter-relations are important components of reading fluency in general. In reviewing different potential sources and types of syntactically based text difficulty, efficient readers must rely in part, though not exclusively, on syntactic devices to get at text meaning.

Pauline Barr et al (1981) also believe that there are four kinds of meaning which an efficient reader must know in a given text. They talk of conceptual meaning which is the meaning a word can have on its own, propositional meaning - the meaning a sentence has on its own, contextual meaning - the meaning a sentence can have only when in context (functional value) and pragmatic meaning, which is the meaning a sentence has only as part of the interaction between writer and reader. It is their opinion that every sentence has these four kinds of meaning when it is used in a text, though sometimes one is more important than

another.

Berman (1984), concludes that where there is conflict between the more basic ordering of semantic and syntactic relations and the surface form of sentences as in passives, or where material is proposed before the surface subject or where adverbial clauses precede rather than follow the main clause, readers might be expected to encounter difficulty. This means that readers' comprehension is liable to be impaired by shifts in S-V-O (subject-verb-object) ordering; for where the typical expectations of the reader are violated, his fluency may be disrupted and hence comprehension hindered.

In his own view, ***W.B. Elley*** (1984:292), opines that home background factors account for some of the difficulties that Fijian readers experience while reading. He says "children from homes where English was regularly used, where the parents were well educated, where the socio-economic levels were high, where there were many books in the home and where parents took an interest in their children's school work, such children read with greater comprehension".

In agreement with the above view, ***Awobode Winifred*** (1977:14), notes that "children who are from non-academic background with no reading materials in their homes tend to perform poorly in reading activities in school." He also states that psychologically, parents' lack of encouragement to their children by not providing them with the reading materials at home

makes the children perform poorly in reading. ***Dauda Kida*** (1977), also attributes the poor reading abilities of children to parents who are mostly illiterate. He also adds socio-economic background, gross ignorance and poor communication as contributory factors to the poor performance of students in reading and learning at large.

Some researchers believe that poor reading habits stem from the faulty teaching of reading and since one first learns to read in the primary school, that is where the battle lines must be drawn. ***Dauda*** (1977), further observes in his work that some teachers receive no training in methods of teaching English as a second language. He says as a result, they grope about in darkness and do not make any effort to learn even from their counterparts who are more experienced.

In her own opinion, ***Carol Hosenfeld*** (1984:246), stresses the point that the one problem that bedevils the teaching of reading is that "students are highly resistant to having their 'habits' changed, especially if they already consider themselves to be perfectly adequate readers in their own language."

In conclusion, almost all the works that have been discussed have some relevance to this particular study. In addition to the different views already discussed, this study, in agreeing to the fact that there are reading difficulties (as would be seen of Kaduna Polytechnic National and Higher National Diploma students), would attempt to identify, analyse and

account for such difficulties with a view to suggesting some possible solutions to them.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From the review of literature, a conceptual framework can be composed. Most accounts of the reading difficulties already discussed seem to focus on three elements that are relevant to the interpretation of the text. These are:

1. The text being read
2. The background knowledge possessed by the reader
3. The contextual aspects, for example, surrounding text and environment. James M. *Royer et al* (1984), in their own opinion, have come up with another element in addition to the already mentioned and this is:
4. The reader's intent (motivation).

To them, these elements are useful in discussing reading comprehension and difficulties. It has been said that the level of detail learned from text will vary depending on what the reader wants to learn from the text. The instances are given that when one reads a novel or short story for pleasure, one can report general details such as plot and gist with ease but recalling with more detail may be difficult.

This is compared to what could be recalled after reading a professional article. Motivation or intent, in their assertion, also accounts for the reason why most researchers could report

in great detail the logic, citations, specific procedures, outcomes and conclusions of articles they have read with little difficulty.

Put within the content of this study, the reading difficulties of National and Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic can be studied (socio-linguistically) using three of the already mentioned four elements, namely - the background knowledge of the reader, the reading text and the reader's intent while reading.

1. The background knowledge, readers from different homes bring different systems of background knowledge to the comprehension process of a text. In this study, it would be found out, the extent to which social or cultural knowledge has influenced the respondent's reading skill, that is the socio-cultural level.
2. The reading text, in discussing reading difficulties, it is fundamental to consider the nature of the text that its readability like word length or syntactic complexity.
3. Reader's - intent; this will consider the role that intent or motivation plays in reading comprehension.

In discussing reading difficulties, it would be fundamental to consider all the socio-linguistic factors that could have contributed to these difficulties. An individual reading ability could be influenced by the circumstances under which he happens to read. In this regard, the age at which they started to read would be considered.

This study conceptualised reading difficulties in the light of the above three areas for the following reasons:

I. The aspect of background knowledge is intended to bring out the different systems of background knowledge that students would bring to the comprehension process. It is generally believed that what one understands of something is a function of one's past experiences and background knowledge.

ii. The reading text it is hoped that the areas that mostly affect the students reading to which the difficulties could be attributable would be explored.

iii. Intent of the reader - motivation has a lot to do with attitudes towards reading, so the students' motivation would be explored so as to know how much it has contributed to the difficulty they have in reading.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 HISTORY OF KADUNA POLYTECHNIC

The Kaduna Polytechnic was established through the decree number 20 of 1968 promulgated by the Federal Government. It took off under the ownership of the then Northern States operating through an Interim Common Service Agency (ICSA). This agency was constituted with the aim of promoting a common social, economics, political and educational development.

Three different institutions operating at different locations in Kaduna fused together to form what has now become the largest polytechnic in Nigeria - the Kaduna Polytechnic. The institutions were the College of science and Technology (CST), the Staff Development Centre (SDC) and the Survey Unit (SU). Today, the polytechnic operates on four campuses under the collegiate system. There are four colleges each headed by a director. The colleges are: College of Science and Technology (CST), College of Engineering (COE), College of Environmental Studies (CES) and College of Administrative and Business Studies (CABS). There are nine schools spread under the four colleges and each headed by a Dean.

The schools are:

CST - School of Education and Science school of Technology.

COE - School of Industrial Engineering

- School of Natural Resources Engineering.

CES - School of Geology and Land Administration

- School of Environmental Science

CABS- School of Administrative and Social Studies

- School of Business Studies

- School of Management Studies

There are now thirty departments with an estimated student population of over ten thousand (10,000). In one of its re-organisation policies, the Federal Government in 1990 took over the ownership of the institution from its former owners thereby making it a federal polytechnic. In 1972, the institution introduced the one year preliminary diploma programme. Successful candidates at the end of the programme automatically proceed to the diploma programme. The National Diploma programme covers all the fields of technical education and it is aimed at making efficient students obtain the necessary requisite qualifications for the award of National Diploma certificate. The programme involves the teaching of four basic sciences; Mathematics, physics, chemistry and Biology with English Language and the vocational courses peculiar to the respective departments. At the end of the programme, the students sit for a common examination which though set by their lecturers, are moderated by external examiners appointed from the Nigerian universities. They moderate both the question papers and the marked scripts. At the Kaduna Polytechnic, the focus of this study, the English language is taught as a subject while at the same time, it is the medium of instruction.

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the design used in this study. The target population, research instruments, data collection and analytical procedures would be described in succession.

3.2 TARGET POPULATION

The Kaduna Polytechnic is made up of many departments and levels. The levels are introductory (Pre-National Diploma), National Diploma and Higher National Diploma. The participants in this study are the National and Higher National Diploma students in the Colleges of Technology, Engineering, Administrative and Business Studies and Environmental Studies. What puts these groups of students on the same platform as far as this study is concerned is the fact that English is a compulsory course for them.

Essentially, therefore, this study addresses National and Higher National Diploma students from various disciplines in Kaduna Polytechnic. An average National Diploma class in the Polytechnic has about thirty (30) students while Higher National Diploma class has about 15-20 students. Two classes were chosen from each college; this gives a rough estimate of two hundred and forty (240) National and 120 Higher National Diploma students that were examined. Apart from students, this study also took into consideration the opinions of some English lecturers in the Polytechnic. The reason is that the broader the sample population, the better the chances of having a representational sample. Also the involvement of

academic staff was in the bid to seek either confirmation or disapproval of some of the students' responses to the questions that pertain to their (students) difficulties in reading.

The staff involvement also helped in arriving at the conclusion of how the students' reading difficulties could be curbed since as language teachers (totaling about forty five), they stood the chance of understanding their students' problems better. All the students selected had gone through at least one year of training in the polytechnic and had therefore, had the experience of what reading in a higher institution is all about.

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Three main research instruments were used for data collection, these were

1. Questionnaire - both staff and students
2. Cloze test
3. Vocabulary test

A socio-linguistic background questionnaire was considered appropriate for this study because certain social variables had to be examined in order to determine their influence on the reading difficulties of the students. To this effect, therefore, emphasis was laid on the students' sex (male or female), age, attitudes towards reading and motivation.

Michael Smithies (1983 : 112) used background questionnaire in assessing the reading habits

of students of the Papua New Guinea University of Technology to see what the extent of the students reading difficulty was. Like Kaduna Polytechnic, the technological institution specialises in engineering, surveying, architecture, building, accountancy and business studies and the language used for the medium of education is also English. So the idea of using questionnaire as one of the instruments was strengthened by his method. In addition, the questionnaire dealt with the students' use of the library - whether they borrowed books or not. It also probed into the reading of newspapers and story books.

The cloze test, which Christina Bratt *et al* (1976), describe as the most successful procedure for determining the level of reading difficulty was used by Elley (1984), in order to find out what were the reading difficulties of second language learners in Fiji - an independent multi-lingual country within the British Commonwealth. In using the cloze test, a passage of about 250 words was selected. Beginning from the second sentence, every fifth word was deleted through out the reading passage leaving an underlined blank in its stead.

The students were given the opportunity to do a practice passage before they began the test proper. Though there are two methods for scoring the cloze test, this study decided to use the appropriate word method instead of the exact word which appeared on the test. This is because it makes sense to use the method which allows any word acceptable in meaning and structure to be counted as correct when testing the level of reading difficulty of an individual.

The vocabulary test was used because it is basic to reading. Also, it enabled the researcher to know how well versed her respondents were in vocabulary. The test consisted of a passage. The students were asked to quote from the passage a word or an expression which had the same meaning as the words and expressions given at the end of the passage. The findings of the two tests constituted valid observable evidence concerning some aspects of the students' reading ability. It is the opinion of this study that it is not possible to totally measure the students' reading difficulties on the basis of only one test, thus it decided to use two.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Some copies of the questionnaire were distributed to some National and Higher National Diploma Students respectively who were randomly selected for pilot-testing. This was to ensure that the items on the questionnaire were comprehensible and thus were such that would not create any problem for the students to answer. As no major difficulties were discovered, the questionnaires were then administered to the target population.

In order to simplify the data collection process, the researcher administered the questionnaire herself in the students' various classrooms. This was necessary so as to classify where there were difficulties. An on-the-spot mode of questionnaire administration also helps to eliminate the possibility of misinterpretation of the questions on the part of the respondents. Also, it ensures that the actual individual(s) for whom the questionnaire is meant is indeed

the one who completes it. The questionnaire copies were administered with the aim of getting answers to the research questions. Some of the questions were open-ended questions so as to give the respondents freedom of expression. Some of the questions were close-ended. This was because the researcher wanted to limit the responses of the respondents and to also cut down on the non-uniformity in the responses expected. There were few "Yes" or "No" questions where the appropriate answer was to be ticked by the respondents.

The reading comprehension test which was based on the cloze procedure was also administered to the students at a different lesson. This exercise took a duration of about thirty minutes and then the papers were collected like the questionnaire. The vocabulary test consisted of fourteen (14) items. In each item, an expression as a word was to be picked out from the given passage. Each of these must have the same meaning with the words or expressions given for example, the first word given at the end of the passage was "traditional" and the students were to quote a word from the passage that had the same meaning. Since it was a short passage, only twenty minutes was allowed for it. The answers to the tests were thoroughly looked at and marked in order to actually identify their areas of difficulty. This was then analysed.

3.5 ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

The following have been used as units of analysis:

i Background knowledge possessed by the reader, that is, how this has influenced their reading ability

ii The reading text, that is, the readability of the text

iii Reader's intent, that is, readers' motivation

The above three elements were put forward by Royer *et al* (in Alderson: 1984) as the three elements that can be considered in a discussion or study of text comprehension which this study also feels is very adequate in the socio-linguistic study of the reading difficulties of National and Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic. Each of these elements or units would be analysed using the question's responses on them in the background questionnaire.

The text being used was concerned with factors like readability, attitude to and comprehension of the passages read. Background knowledge dealt with age and language spoken mostly at home and here, the emphasis is on how much readers' comprehension is affected by the activation or non-activation of background knowledge. The reader's intent was analysed taking into consideration the motive or purpose of reading and how this guides the whole process of reading. This would go a long way in determining the attitudes of the respondents to reading. Under this heading, the respondents were asked the aspect of reading they like, for example, story books written in English, and whether they have dictionaries of

their own.

All the results were analysed and the method of analysis is percentaging. The aim of using this is in order to get the accurate response of the students to the different questions asked. The percentages were shown in Chapter Four. This study recognises the limitations and justification in the use of percentaging. The study is aware that presentation of percentages with one or two decimal places makes no sense unless the "quality" of the data collection is so good that it is meaningful to say 70.5% and not 70.6% say "No" or the purpose of the data collection is such that it makes a difference in interpretation whether 70.5% and not 70.6% say "No" - Gultang,(1967). This study has decided to use decimals despite the idea given by Gultang as already stated and despite the fact that some scholars have suggested that percentages should be stated without any decimals to avoid a false impression of exactness because the study considers that there is more danger in rounding-off percentages than in decimalising them in the sense that in rounding off percentages, the bit added or subtracted may make a big difference and completely distort the results. The decision, therefore, of this study to decimalise is not, with any intention of being exact as it were but of presenting the results as they were.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 PREAMBLE

This chapter seeks to analyse the reading difficulties among National and Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic.

The chapter will be based on the following analytical units:

1. The background knowledge of the students
2. The reading text
3. The reader's intent.

An attempt was made to find answers to the research questions stated in 1.3. A detailed analysis now follows using the above three factors in considering responses from the National and Higher National Diploma students under study.

4.1 BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE - (National Diploma)

In looking at the background knowledge of the students, the study examined the extent to which their background has influenced their reading difficulties. The factor of background knowledge of the students was evaluated by means of items 1 - 8 on the questionnaire. For example, some of the questions were as follow:

Question 1

Which language did you first learn to speak?

MT = Mother tongue

E = English

No of respondents	MT	%	E	%
180	180	100	-	-

All the 180 students examined indicated that the language they first learned to speak was their mother tongue, (vernacular).

Question 2

What language do you speak to members of your family?

E = English only

V = Vernacular only

B = Both

No of respondents	E	%	V	%	B	%
180	30	17	143	79	7	4

As can be seen from the table, only about 4% of the respondents use both English and vernacular to communicate with members of their families, about 79% of them (143) speak with members of their families using the vernacular. Seventeen percent speak only English.

Question 3

At what age did you start to speak English?

No. Of Respondents	No. that spoke English between age 3 - 13	%	No. that spoke English after age 13	%
180	162	90	18	10

Out of the one hundred and eighty students examined, only eighteen (18) could not speak English before age 13 which is the expiration of the critical age range of language acquisition. About 162 (90%) of the students could speak English before they were thirteen years old.

Question 4

At what age did you start to read?

No. of Respondents	No. that started to read between age 5 - 7	%	No. that started to read between age 8 - 10	%	No. that started to read after age 10	%
180	40	22.2	96	53.3	44	24.4

The ages of the 180 students examined in these classes ranged between 18 and 25 years. Forty of these students could read between ages 5 - 7. Ninety six (53.3%) of them (the

majority) could read between ages 8 - 10 while 44 (24.4%) started to read after age 10.

One could observe from the table that the students were exposed to reading early enough.

Higher National Diploma

Question 1

What language did you first learn to speak?

MT = Mother Tongue

E = English

No of respondents	MT	%	E	%
120	120	100	-	-

All the students spoke vernacular.

Question 2

What language do you speak to members of your family?

E = English

V = Vernacular

B = Both

No of respondents	E	%	V	%	B	%
120	50	42	55	46	15	12

Fifty speak English, fifty five speak Vernacular while only 15 speak both to members of their families.

At what age did you start to speak English?

No of respondents	No that spoke English between age 3-13	%	No that spoke English after age 13	%
120	72	60	48	40

As could be observed from the table, only 48 students could not speak English before the expiration of the critical age range of language acquisition (age 13).

Question 4

At what age did you start to read?

No of respondents	No that read between age 5-7	%	No that read between age 8-10	%	No that read after age 10	%
120	25	21	30	25	65	54

The age range of these students was between 22 and 35. Out of these, twenty five could read between ages 5 and 7, thirty between ages 8 and 10 and sixty five could read after they were 10 years old.

4.2 THE READING TEXT - (National Diploma)

Factors like readability, comprehension and interest are considered likely to influence the students' full understanding of the text. The reading text would, therefore, be discussed

using the following questions:

Question 5

Do you find most of the books you read outside the prescribed texts easy to understand?

No. of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
180	62	34.4	118	65.6

Majority of the students confirmed that they did not find most of the books they read outside their prescribed texts easy to understand. Only 62 of them (34.4%) find these books easy to understand. From this information, it is evident that these students only read their prescribed books, in fact, reading of newspapers, magazines or story books was not important to them. They were not even used to borrowing books from the library as most of their responses indicated

Question 6

Are the difficulties you have in reading English books similar to the difficulties you have while reading in your first language?

No. of respondents	Yes	%	No.	%
180	25	3.9	155	86.1

As the above table shows, only 25 (13.9%) of the students have similar difficulties with reading both in English and in their first language. One hundred and fifty five (155,

86%) do not have similar difficulties.

Question 7

What do you think are the factors responsible for these difficulties?

T = Teacher does not teach well

L = Lecture hours are not enough

E = English is a difficult language

I = Lack of interest

A = All of the above

No of respondents	T	%	L	%	E	%	I	%	A	%
180	8	4.4	20	11.1	43	23.9	109	60.6	-	-

Majority of the students attributed their difficulty in reading to lack of interest - 60.6% of the students said they did not have interest, 43 (23.9%) complained of English being a very difficult language. Twenty (20), that is 11.1% said that the lecture hours were not enough while only eight (4.4%) said teachers did not teach well.

Question 8

How would you grade your reading ability?

E = Excellent

G = Good

F = Fair

JF = Just fair

BA = Below Average

No. of respondents	E	%	G	%	F	%	JF	%	BA	%
180	-	-	114	63.3	58	32.2	8	4.5	-	-

One hundred and fourteen (63.3%) of the students graded their reading ability as "good", fifty-eight (32.3%) as "fair" and only eight (4.5%) as "Just fair". Interestingly, none of them rated their ability in reading as either " Excellent" or " Below Average".

Question 9

Are most of the books you read suitable to your background and environment?

No. of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
180	139	77.2	41	22.8

About 77% of the students said most of the books they read were suitable to their background and environment.

Higher National Diploma

Question 5.

Do you find most of the books you read outside the prescribed texts easy to understand?

No of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
120	92	76.6	28	23.4

Majority of the students found the books easy to understand unlike the ordinary level diploma students. Only about 23% said they did not find them easy to understand.

Question 6.

Are the difficulties you have in reading English books similar to the difficulties you have while reading in your first language?

No of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
120	44	36.6	76	63.4

Out of the 120 students, seventy-six did not have similar difficulties while 44 confessed that the difficulties they had was similar to the ones they had while reading English books.

Question 7.

What do you think are the factors responsible for these difficulties?

T = Teacher does not teach well

L = Lecture hours are not enough

E = English is a difficult language

I = Lack of interest

A = All of the above.

No of respondents	T	%	L	%	E	%	I	%	A	%
120	3	2.5	17	4.1	42	35	5.8	48.4	-	-

Lack of interest was the major factor responsible for these difficulties according to the students' response. The National Diploma students confessed this fact too. Only 17 of them said lecture hours were not enough while three attributed the difficulties to lack of good teaching.

Question 8.

How would you grade your reading ability?

E = Excellent

G = Good

F = Fair

JF = Just fair

BA = Below Average

No of respondents	E	%	G	%	F	%	JF	%	BA	%
120	2	1.7	96	80	18	15	4	3.3	-	-

None of the students graded their reading ability as below average. Only 2 said their reading ability was "Excellent" while 4 were just fair. Majority of them (80%) rated their reading ability as "good"

Question 9.

Are most of the books you read suitable to your background and environment?

No of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
120	94	78	26	22

Most of the students said that most of the books they read were suitable to their background and environment.

4.3 READER'S INTENT - (National Diploma)

The purpose of examining the reader's intent was to know the extent to which motivation helps a reader to have full comprehension of whatever he/she reads. The level of detail learned from text will vary depending on what the reader wants to learn from the text.

Question 10

What do you enjoy most in English lesson?

S = Speaking,

R = Reading,

W = Writing

No. of respondents	S	%	R	%	W	%
180	113	62.8	48	26.7	19	105

Most of the students enjoyed speaking.

Question 11

Do you like reading story books in English?

No. of respondents	Yes	%	No.	%
180	176	97.8	4	2.2

Most of them like reading story books. In fact, only 4 (2.2%) said they did not.

Higher National Diploma

Question 10.

What do you enjoy most in English lessons?

S = Speaking

R = Reading

W = Writing

No of respondents	S	%	R	%	W	%
120	76	63	24	20	20	17

About 63% enjoyed speaking most in English lessons. Only 17% enjoyed writing while 20% enjoyed reading.

Question 11.

Do you like reading story books in English?

No of respondents	Yes	%	No	%
120	115	96	5	4

96% of the students liked reading story books in English.

4.4 THE CLOZE TEST - (National Diploma)

The cloze test was given to the students so as to further determine their level of reading difficulty. The passage given consisted of about 220 words. From the second sentence,

every fifth word was deleted though the last sentence was also left intact like the first sentence. Altogether, thirty four (34) words were deleted. The test papers were marked and the results analysed as shown below

AA = Above Average i.e 50 - 100%; BA = Below Average i.e 49 - 0%

No. of respondents	AA	%	BA	%
180	42	23	138	77

The test was administered to a sample of 180 National Diploma and 120 Higher National Diploma students in some randomly selected classes from the four colleges (CST, COE, CES, CABS) in the polytechnic. While the performance of a few students was found to be creditable, it was found that more than 70% of the National Diploma students scored low marks to indicate that they were virtually non-readers of simple English prose. The word "on" that was supposed to be inserted in the blank " and even mathematics depend_____", seemed to be the simplest for the students as they all got it right. Also, the article "the" in the blanks "_____more complex the material, _____ more important the ability to read becomes", did not give them any problem as most of the students wrote the right word. The second paragraph appears to be more difficult for the students. This may be because some of the words are not very familiar. The following table lists some of the deleted words in the second paragraph and the number of correct and incorrect answers.

TABLE I No. of correct/incorrect answers

Deleted word	No. Of correct answers	No. Of incorrect answers
Few	14	166
a	37	143
Supposed	2	178
Problems	132	48
of	171	9
and	176	4
Prime	53	127
Public	0	180
was	177	3
to	180	0
all	95	85
Marvellous	0	180
what	147	33
Television	0	180
Flexibility	0	180
more	163	17
dogmatic	0	180

None of the students got the following words right - 'public', 'marvellous', 'television', 'flexibility' and 'dogmatic'. The following table shows some of the answers given by the

students .

TABLE 2: Words and wrong substitutes:

Deleted Word	Wrong substitutes
Public	bureaucracy, world, students.
Marvellous	new, other, simple, important, some.
Television	it, what, teachers, which, this .
Flexibility	chalk, information, material, equipment.
dogmatic	Trained, educating, educated, learned

Most of the students substituted "good" for the word "prime" while many of them did not give any word for "flexibility". On the whole, only 42 National Diploma students (23%) scored a little bit above average. In order to clarify the disturbing findings of the cloze test, we administered another test on vocabulary. This was considered necessary because vocabulary is basic to reading. Also we wanted to know how far it had contributed to the reading difficulties of the National and Higher National Diploma students. For this purpose, a passage of about 250 words was given to them and at the end of the passage, some words were given (14 of them) and the students were asked to choose words from the passage that had the same meanings with the ones given -- this we referred to as the vocabulary test.

These were also collected and marked. The following were words given at the end of the passage and the students were to quote from the passage a word or an expression which had the same meaning as each of them: 1 traditional 2 - lower end 3-foreign 4 - actual increase 5-Predetermined 6- suitable for secluded 8 - Partitioned 9 broken down 10 angle 11 - dabble 12- broken down 10 - angle 11 - dabble 12 - horrible 13 queer ideas 14- experts. The general score was a little bit above average. The analysis of the students performance showed that some of the words appeared difficult for the students. Some of the students examined did not give any synonym for the following words - secluded, partitioned, horrible and queer ideas. Table III shows some of the answers given by the students

Table 3: **Words and wrong synonyms**

Word	**Wrong Synonyms**
Secluded	dismiss, guarded, divide
broken down	threshold, fagments,dissolve
Partitioned	separated, narrow, divide
dabble	intrude, native, random
horrible	terrible, unpleasant, obsession
queer ideas	funny, experience, obsession

A few of the words appeared to be simple for the students as they had the correct synonyms for the words. The table below shows the word and the answers.

Table 4:	**Cases of correct synonyms**
lower end	threshold
Foreign	western
actual increase	Veritable boom
Suitable	fit
angle	perspective.

Unfortunately, the word "traditional" which we thought would be very easy for the students, proved difficult too. Some of the words given by the students to replace "tradition" were: custom, prejudice, tribal regions, anthropology, old fashioned, native. In fact, more than 80% of the students had either "custom" or "old fashioned", as the words that could be used to replace "traditional".

In order to get the scores in percentage, each student's score was placed over 14 and multiplied by 100 (the total number of words given to them was 14). Those who scored fifty percent and above (above average) were 95 while the rest (85) had less than 50% (below average), as shown below:

AA = Above average (50 - 100%)

BA = Below average (49 - 0%)

No. of respondents	AA	%	BA	%
180	95	52.8	85	47.2

Higher National Diploma

As was mentioned earlier in this work, the cloze test was administered to 120 Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic and the result is as analysed below:

No of respondents	AA	%	BA	%
120	104	87	16	13

The performance of most of the students (87%) was above average. Only 13% of the students scored below average. The general performance was better than that of National Diploma students. The reason for the difference in performance could be due to the fact that their level (HND) was higher and so most of the words were not new to them. Also their level of reasoning was higher because of the age difference - most of the HND students were more advanced in age compared with most of the National Diploma students who came to the Polytechnic directly from the secondary school. Table 5 lists some of the deleted words and the number of correct and incorrect answers:

Table 5 - No of correct /incorrect answers

Deleted Word	No of correct answers	No of incorrect answers
Few	107	13
A	120	-
Supposed	95	25
Problems	98	22
Of	120	-
And	120	-
Prime	54	66
Public	51	69
Was	117	3
To	120	-
All	88	32
Marvellous	76	44
What	106	14
Television	83	37
Flexibility	42	78
More	120	-
Dogmatic	23	97

The words that appeared very difficult for the students were "transferred", "Prime",

"flexibility", "dogmatic". Some words substituted for them are as shown below

Deleted Word	Wrong Substitution
Transferred	used, read, exhausted, explained
Prime	good, story, needed, typical
Flexibility	information, understanding, us.
Dogmatic	Strict, educated, learned

VOCABULARY TEST.

The general performance of the Higher National Diploma students in the Vocabulary test was better than that of National Diploma students. The score is shown in the following table.

Table 6.

A = Above Average (50 - 100%) BA = Below Average (49 - 0%)

No of Respondents	AA	%	BA	%
120	86	71.7	34	28.3

About 72% scored above average while about 28% scored below average. The following words were difficult for the HND students as they could not get the right synonyms for them : dabble, queer ideas, secluded, partitioned. The answers given are shown in table 7.

Table 7: Word and Synonym

Word	Wrong Synonyms
Dabble	rush in, engage in, wade into
Sweer ideas	unusual thought, old fashioned
Secluded	breed apart, isolated
Partitioned	divided, carved up.

On the whole it was a good performance.

4.5 TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The teachers' questionnaire was also designed to provide information and confirm the responses of the students to their own (students) questionnaire. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of 17 items to give information about their qualification, time allocated to English, reading, resources etc. All the forty five teachers were graduates. The number of years in the teaching profession ranged from 5 - 21 years. Periods allocated to teaching English in the classes taught by these teachers were two hours per week. According to the teachers, not much of these periods were devoted to reading.

On reading resources, it was found out that most of the students were given the reading materials (Passages). Most of the books used by the teachers could not be found in the school library, they were not available. From the responses of the teachers, it was

discovered that the students found the passages not so easy to read despite the fact that the passages were interesting and suitable to their background and environment.

In response to whether teachers had attended any special course on teaching of reading at the higher school level, there was no indication that any of them had ever attended such courses. In the area of methodology, most of the teachers did not give individual help in reading. There were no special activities to improve the students rate of reading.

4.6 **DISCUSSION**

A discussion of the general results of the National and Higher National diploma classes with which this study is concerned now follows. This discussion was done according to the three main factors already mentioned:

i. The background knowledge

ii. The reading text

iii. The reader's intent.

4.6.1. **THE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE**

In reference to the background knowledge, the students' results showed that the background of the students had a lot to do with their reading ability.

When asked about the language that was first spoken by them, all the students confirmed

the fact that it was their mother tongue that was first spoken. In fact, only thirty ND and fifty-five HND students spoke English to members of their families as shown in question 2. This made it difficult for them to grasp the English Language when they were later introduced to it probably in school. Considering the age range that they started to speak English, most of the students started before the expiration of the critical age range of language acquisition which is 3 - 13 years.

About 53.3% of the National Diploma students could read before they were ten years old while only 25% of the Higher National Diploma students could read before age 10. Ten years was used as a yardstick because that is the age that most of them were assumed to be in their upper primary class-just before entering the secondary school. About 24.4% of the ND and 54% HND students could not read until much later in life after they were ten years old. There is, therefore, the likelihood that the students who could speak English before the expiration of the critical age of language acquisition also started to read at an early age much earlier than those who could not speak before age 13, thus the difference in their performance in both the vocabulary and cloze tests.

4.6.2 **THE READING TEXT**

The results revealed that the difficulties they had in reading were numerous. These difficulties, as indicated by the students, were not similar to the difficulties they had while reading in their first language. This could be explained that the students read better

in their first language : about 86.1% ND and 64% HND students agreed to this fact.

On factors responsible for their reading difficulties, majority of the students complained of lack of interest, at least 60.6% did. This could explain why they found reading books (English) more difficult than reading in their first language. Forty three (23.9%) of ND students said English was a difficult language. To this group of students, it was because of the difficulty of English language that they did not perform well in their reading. Only 11.1% of the students said the lecture hours were not enough, while 4.4% complained of teachers' inefficiency at teaching reading at the National Diploma level. See question 7. 17 of the HND students complained of inadequate lecture hours.

Again, the students' self-assessment of their reading ability showed that none of the 180 of the ND and 120 HND students examined rated their reading as "excellent". Most of them were just "good" at reading as the table shows (table 8). About 32.2% of the ND students were fair and 4.5% were "just fair". Their lack of interest, as most of them indicated (See question 7), could be assumed to be the cause of their inability to read excellently well. Also non-native readers of English who enter tertiary education and find that most or all of their subject textbooks are written in English have some problems in interpreting the text. These students had only studied English as a foreign language. The students, about (77%) agreed that the books they read, most of the books read, were suitable to their background and environment. This in effect meant that the text was

relevant to their social context.

4.6.3 **READERS' INTENT**

In this section, the study sought to know whether the purpose for which the students read had effect on their comprehension of the text. Generally, the factor of intent was evaluated by means of items 9 and 10 of the back-ground questionnaire.

Most of the students (62.2%) enjoyed speaking more than reading and writing. Forty-eight (26.7%) ND students enjoyed reading and only nineteen (10.5%) enjoyed writing while among the HND students, 63% enjoyed speaking and only 17% enjoyed writing. On whether they had dictionaries, majority of the students claimed to have and that they made use of them in the class. Only 5% did not have. Majority of the ND students liked reading story books in English. Only 2.2% of them claimed they did not like reading story books in English Language. All the HND students (100%) liked reading story books in English. If it was actually true that they liked reading story books as indicated, one would have expected their performances in both the cloze and vocabulary tests to be a little bit better than what they scored. If the right motivation is lacking in reading, it creates a problem. Having the right objective can enhance intentional learning from text, but the objectives must be clearly stated.

Our findings have shown that a majority of the students did not have the right attitude to

reading and this greatly affected their ability in reading. It therefore, follows that if they did not have the right intent, then it had to do with the fact that they were not motivated right from home. Most of our students only read for examination and this can hardly improve their reading ability.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 SUMMARY

This study had the aim of probing into the reading difficulties among National and Higher National Diploma Students of Kaduna Polytechnic. The study intended to identify such difficulties, trace the factors that were responsible for them and seek how they would be removed.

To realise these objectives, four main instruments were used for data collection. The background questionnaire was intended to gather socio-linguistic information on the target population. The teachers' questionnaire was intended to help in determining the extent of the students' reading difficulties and to know the genuiness of some of the students' responses to their own (students) questionnaire. Both cloze and vocabulary tests were administered with the aim of determining the aspects and extent of the difficulties.

Data analysis was divided into three main factors namely:

1. **Background knowledge :**

   The background knowledge considered those factors like age, language spoken at home, when reading started and when the students started to speak English. It was considered that those factors could have been the preliminary cause of the students' difficulties in reading, that is the extent to which their background had contributed to these difficulties.

2. **The Reading text:**

The reading text examined factors like read-ability, comprehension and interest in reading other books outside the prescribed texts.

3. **Reader's intent** was concerned with the type of books students like to read for example story books; also what they enjoyed most in their English lessons etcetera The readers' intent had to do with motivation which was considered important to reading comprehension.

This method of analysis was culled from Royer *et al* (1984) in order to attempt to answer the following questions in this study :

i What are the reading difficulties among the National and Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic ?

ii What are the socio-linguistic factors responsible for these difficulties ?

iii Are the reading difficulties reading problems or language problems?

iv How would these difficulties be removed among these students for better comprehension and performance ?

The results of this study were analysed and presented by means of percentage ratings. Going by the results, it is discernible that most of the National Diploma and Higher National Diploma students of Kaduna Polytechnic encountered a lot of difficulties in their reading. All the students, in their response to the question of what language they first

learned to speak, admitted that it was the vernacular that they first learned. Again, about 79% of the National Diploma students spoke vernacular to members of their families while 46% of Higher National Diploma students spoke vernacular to members of their families. In addition to this, it was discovered that majority did not start to read until about eight years of age (ND) and 10 years of age (HND). As could be seen from this analysis, home background factors accounted for some of these difficulties. When they were introduced to either speaking and reading in English, they regarded it as burdensome instead of something pleasurable, thus the required interest was not there.

When the influence of the home background was removed, several other problems were revealed by the findings. The students seemed to know only a little bit of literal meaning in a passage: anything beyond that was a difficulty for them. The area of critical reading was a very serious problem among the students. If one cannot read between the lines, there will be no full comprehension. As a result of this, the cloze test given to the students appeared difficult for them as most of them could not replace the blanks with their appropriate words, especially the ND Students. This also testified to the fact that little vocabulary was known by the students. The few who scored a little bit above average might likely be those who claimed they spoke both English and their vernaculars to their family members; also, there were those (22.2%) who started to read early between 5 and 7 years of age.

It was worrying to note that 45.6% of the students said they never borrowed books from the library, while about 69% said they sometimes read newspapers. No wonder then that only 27.7% ND and 20% HND students said they enjoyed reading most in English lessons.

5.1 CONCLUSION

The promotion of a good reading habit among students enrolled in the technical institutions is a matter of concern to all who have genuine interest in educational development. Reading is regarded as a life-long educational process. The aims of the Kaduna Polytechnic in teaching the English language are as varied and diverse as the needs and interests of the students. The one aim which is the chief motivating factor in teaching English is to make the students good readers by developing their reading skills. It is a fact that each discipline in the Kaduna Polytechnic has its own language and concepts that emphasise certain reading skills to achieve understanding of the material. The rapid development of technology has caused the constant creation of new technical terms. Some words are unique to technical fields and others are hard to understand because they have special meanings in the occupation. Reading in science, for example, requires the ability to follow a sequence of events and it is expected that a student should be able to follow this sequence.

Findings, however, reveal that students can spend years in the classroom and still be found to be facing a lot of difficulties in their reading. From the results gathered, it was evident that a myriad of problems did confront the National Diploma Students of Kaduna Polytechnic in their reading, owing to a total absence or inadequate development of efficient reading skills. An analysis of the test results further showed that most of the National Diploma students were weak in their reading ability.

The difficulties which students encountered in reading include the following, finding it difficult to distinguish main ideas from relevant and irrelevant details, that is extracting the main ideas conveyed by topic sentences and relating them intelligently and meaningfully. In addition, the students exhibited uncritical reading behaviour which manifested in their inability to read between the lines. They were incapable of reading and forming new ideas or feelings from what was learned in their reading. This might be due to the fact that reading comprehension was often restricted to its literal sense.

Another intimidating reading problem faced by the students, (especially the National Diploma students) was inadequate word power or vocabulary. In fact, students who are deficient in reading skills often lack adequate vocabulary. It thus becomes an irony of situation that words which are supposed to be building blocks to an efficient reader turn out to be stumbling blocks to effective reading for many students who lack adequate word power. This problem assumes greater intensity in materials requiring inferential reading which requires the comprehension of the connotative or situational meanings of words.

The students also faced the problem of slow reading. This slows down comprehension rate because thoughts are not communicated in words but in sequence of words and the grammatical relationship between them. Reading word by word makes it difficult for a reader to grasp the message conveyed because by the time he gets to the last word of a sentence, he will not only have forgotten what the first is, but also lost contact with the

relationship between the words.

These difficulties could be traced to different sources. From all indications, the home background factors accounted for some of these difficulties that the students encountered in their reading. As earlier discussed, all the students examined spoke vernacular to members of their families. Most of them also confessed that the language they first learned to speak was the vernacular. Also, they were not introduced to reading early enough.

Surprisingly enough, most of the students, as revealed, were not inclined to read attentively unless it was known that there would be check on their reading in the form of a test or examination. Little required reading seemed to go on among them, also some of the courses offered in the polytechnic appeared to have no required texts at all.

Another factor, undoubtedly, leading to reading difficulties was that the students considered reading as a chore and not a pleasurable informative activity. The students read relatively little and if there was no reading done by these students outside their instructional periods, one would scarcely expect reading standards to be high. As a result of this general lack of reading interests, the students were not indulged in extra-curricular reading as many of them confirmed that they did not read even newspapers and magazines that were available in the school library.

There was also the factor of reading in a language that was basically not one's mother tongue. The students (86.1% ND and 63% HND) admitted the fact that the difficulties they encountered while reading in English was not the same as when they were reading in their first language. Despite the fact that English was used as the medium of instruction and also the language of government, commerce and the media, the motivation to read was still very low among these students. Poor language development and poor linguistic cultural experiences were also factors that were revealed. Reading ability is inextricably tied with language arts which is a complex interwoven system of communicating ideas; and communicating ideas is a two -way process that involves giving ideas to others as in writing, speaking and oral reading; and receiving ideas from others as in listening and silent reading. This complexity, therefore, implies that if other language skills are generally poor or inadequately developed, reading problems are likely to occur.

Another causative factor of the reading difficulties has to do with familiarity with the topic of the reading matter. Sometimes, reading and understanding is made difficult by unfamiliarity with the subject of the text. As question 5 in chapter 4 shows, about 66% of the ND students said they did not find most of the books they read easy to understand. But most HND students found it easy to understand. A related factor was the students' inability to recognise and mouth words correctly. This is because English spelling is not phonemic - there is no one-to-one correspondence between the orthographic form of a word and its phonetic realisation. This contrasted with what the students were familiar

with. Asked in the questionnaire to list some of the difficulties they had in reading, many of the examined students confessed that pronunciation was a problem they encountered.

Lack of concentration could be adduced as one of the factors. If a reader's attention is distracted from what he is reading in one way or the other, comprehension will be affected. Judging by some of the answers given to the cloze test, one may not be wrong to say that concentration was lacking as some of the words given as answers to replace the blanks did not make sense. Lack of interest in recreational reading is a result of lack of awareness of the importance of reading.

The problems of reading may also have taken roots from poor or wrong approach to the teaching of reading. It is true that many students do suffer from lack of good models in the classroom and probably in the community too. This could be explained with the fact that since the proclamation of independence in 1960, there has been a steady withdrawal of expatriate native English teachers from Nigerian schools. The Kaduna Polytechnic seems not to have much of this causative factor as only a negligible number of the students examined (8, that is, 4.4% ND and 3% HND) attributed their reading difficulties to the teachers.

The abject lack of interest in recreational reading is a result of the high rate of illiteracy and scarcity of facilities for extra-curricular reading. Owing to the generally poor literacy

level and the consequent lack of awareness of the importance of reading, Nigerian families and communities in direct contrast to what obtains in the developed countries, do not establish their own libraries, let alone encourage their members to regard reading as a hobby and a veritable means of spending leisure and profiting from vicarious experiences. This attitude is then carried along to educational spheres by students.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

A study like this would definitely fail to achieve its ultimate objective if at the end of the findings no suggestions are made as to how the reading difficulties already identified among the National and Higher National Diploma students, the focus of this study, could be possibly removed. The recommendations are presented in sections as follows:

5.2.1 THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR TECHNICAL EDUCATION (NBTE)

In spite of recent technological advances, it is most unlikely that the need to read will ever disappear. It is, therefore, the duty of the NBTE (the body responsible for all Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country) to see that students are both encouraged and required to read and use books.

It is, therefore, pertinent that in constructing the English syllabus for both National and Higher National Diploma, the National Board for Technical Education should involve the various subject lecturers or their representatives. These representatives should then endeavour to get synchronised idea from their colleagues with the choice of text-books to be used and specific areas to be covered. This is necessary because as teachers, they know and understand the students' problem areas better and can, therefore, make better choices of books and areas that can help the students. In Kaduna Polytechnic, communication skill is a subsidiary subject; it is nevertheless indispensable since it seems to hold the key to the effective acquisition of knowledge and skill in the technical course.

This subject should be given a greater pride of place in their scheme of work.

Again, since in the Polytechnic, the teaching of communication skills is for specific purpose, as a means to an end of helping students to cope with their studies, the various sub-skills of study skills in all their ramifications should be incorporated into behavioural objectives of their syllabus. It is also recommended that the word "**comprehension**" on the ND syllabus be replaced with "**Reading**" with the objective that must explicitly include inculcation of critical and creative reading habits in students. This suggestion becomes imperative because "**comprehension**", apart from the fact that it fails to capture the essence of reading, conjures in the mind of an average teacher the idea of word recognition and literal comprehension. While the practical nature of technology is not disputed, students on graduation need to be fully aware citizens able to keep up with change in their specialist fields and to do this, they must have acquired and sustained the good reading habit.

5.2.2 THE KADUNA POLYTECHNIC

An area where reading can be promoted is through greater use of the polytechnic library's facilities. The library should be better equipped than what it is at present. The Polytechnic authority should encourage students by advising and making them know the importance of reading. Doing this may create some interest in them. In addition, more well-trained teachers should be employed so that no teacher will have a class with more

than 30 students on the average. This will allow for comprehensible exercise and corrections to be made conveniently. Also the hours allocated to communication skills should be increased to enable adequate time to be assigned to the teaching of reading skills.

5.2.3 THE TEACHERS

Teachers should pay particular attention to specific areas of the students' difficulties and find ways of curbing them. This could be done by frequently looking into individual problems of the students, giving them regular reading exercises relating to such problem areas.

The obsolete alphabetic approach to the teaching of reading as well as the attitude that views reading in the sense of word recognition and literal comprehension needs changing in favour of the analytic method which emphasises learning reading in the context of language experience as well as the attitude which sees reading in its broadest sense.

There is the need for every teacher of any subject on the school curriculum to see himself/herself as a teacher of reading skills, especially study skills. They should encourage students to read by referring them to text-books to be sourced in the library and by instructing them on how to go about fishing out the specific items required from them. With time, the practice will become second nature to the students.

The teachers should also emphasise a purpose for reading because if students do not know what they are reading for, then they are more likely to try to understand everything or on the otherhand, they may lose interest.

5.2.4 THE STUDENTS

Students are recommended to keep up-to-date in their areas of specialisation by reading. They (students) should on their own indulge in extensive reading besides those given them at school by their teachers. They should make an effort to desist from the routine practice of speaking vernaculars. They should see it as a challenge to use English in as many situations as possible be it formal or informal, no matter what mistakes they make. This will go a long way in improving their reading. The students are encouraged to develop interest in reading.

In conclusion, it is considered that these suggestions may take time to be effected because improvement in the quality of reading in Kaduna Polytechnic especially among the National and Higher National Diploma students will no doubt be a slow process. But it is hoped that if these suggestions are taken seriously and heeded, the reading difficulties of students at large would be greatly redressed and one can expect a significant improvement in the development of reading among students enrolled in the Polytechnics.

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