



# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Edited By:  
Olawale A. Moronkola  
Olufemi A. Fakolade  
Kelechi U. Lazarus



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# Promoting Reading Habits of Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Nigeria

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*Kelechi Uchemadu Lazarus**Dept. of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.**ppadaeze@yahoo.com*

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## Introduction

Reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print. It is a language skill that consists of a number of different components. It is closely connected with other language skills namely; listening, writing and speaking. According to *No Child Left Behind* (2009), efficient reading requires all of the following: the skill and knowledge to understand how phonemes or speech sounds are connected to print, the ability to decode unfamiliar words, the ability to read fluently, the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print, and the development and maintenance of a motivation to read. However, many secondary school students with learning disabilities have difficulties acquiring these reading skills mostly because they do not have or use good reading habits and this in turn affect their reading activities and overall performance at school.

*Saskatchewan* (2002b) identified three essential characteristics of secondary school students in Grades 10 to 12. These characteristics are that students know that:

- i. effective readers use a range of reading strategies before, during, and after interacting with texts to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate what is said;



- ii. reading a range of text-prose, fiction and nonfiction, drama and poetry, extends one's understanding of self and the world and
- iii. different texts share our view of the world and shape us personally.

Although these characteristics are common among all learners within Grades 7-12, students with learning disabilities in these grades manifest unique reading habits that do not conform to these general reading habits of their peers. Buttressing the need for good reading habits by all students particularly, those with learning disabilities, Ögeyik and Akyay (2009) explained that reading habits can shape mental capacities and develop personalities of individuals. Against this background, specialists in the field of learning disabilities deem it fit to examine the kinds of special reading habits of students with learning disabilities and proffer suggestions on how to promote good reading habits among these students.

### **What is Reading Habit?**

Reading is an important multidimensional visual and mental activity. No kind of effective learning can be achieved if an individual does not know how to read efficiently and effectively or has not yet acquired the skill to do so. Among the varied dimensions of the concept of reading is the aspect of reading habit. According to Hornby (2000) in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, the word "habit" can be defined as a thing you do often and almost without thinking, especially something that is hard to stop doing or a usual behaviour. Habits can be good or bad. They can also be acquired or learnt. Just like other behaviours, habits can be changed, promoted or nurtured. Habits are often repeated till they become part and parcel of a person's lifestyle. By induction, therefore, a reading habit is an act somebody does often and almost without thinking any time the person is reading. It refers to a person's usual behaviour whenever he or she is reading or usual behaviour toward reading. Poor reading habits refer to behaviours that people engage in often and



unconsciously whenever they are reading that are bad/or that are not good.

Wagner (2002) posited that in measurable terms, reading habit is often considered in terms of the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well as the average time spent on reading. In similar light, Shen (2006) described reading habits in terms of, how often, how much, and what students read while Ögeyik and Akyay (2009) stated that reading is a long-term habit which helps readers to acquire creativeness and critical thinking. In addition, Chettri and Rout (2013) noted that the activity of reading is regarded as a habit when it is carried out repeatedly. According to them, an individual has developed a reading habit and interest (that is, selection of a subject matter or preference for a *genre* of literature being read) when such an activity is repeatedly carried out voluntarily for leisure. Specifically, Alegbeleye (2015) reiterated that reading helps to increase vocabulary development of all learners, enhances academic achievement, increases students' intellectual abilities and improves their aesthetic personality in society. Thus, reading habits can be described as being closely related to both the type of materials read and the taste, interest or likeness a student has for a reading material.

### **Examples of Poor Reading Habits Exhibited by Students with Learning Disabilities**

More than three decades ago Nzeako (1982) as cited by Fabunmi and Olayinka (2010) asserted that the average Nigerian was taught neither how to read well nor how to acquire the skill for reading proficiently. Secondary school students with learning disabilities are also not exempted from this trend and as such many of them display specific difficulties emanating from their poor reading habits. In Nzeako's (1982) opinion, cited by Fabunmi and Olayinka (2010), the following poor reading habits are common among all learners in Nigeria:

- i. Moving of the lips and vocalising what he reads.
- ii. Reading all materials at the same rate.



- iii. Being frequently stopped by an unfamiliar word. Reading each word one by one and this is a sign of short word-span.
- iv. Back-tracking and re-reading words and/or lines.

Similarly, *Speedy Eyes* (2016) argued that many individuals are guilty of three bad reading habits namely: sub-vocalization, re-reading and word-by-word reading. Obviously, students with learning disabilities are not immune against these reading anomalies. However, it could be right to deduce that many students with learning disabilities actually display all these bad reading habits. Sub-vocalization according to *Speedy Eyes* (2016), refers to conversationally pronouncing words “in one’s head” while reading. Students sub-vocalize when they actually move their lips while softly or quietly pronouncing words as they read.

Linares (2002) described sub-vocalization as pronouncing words in the voice box of the throat without making sounds. Depending on what and why a student is reading, sub-vocalization may not actually be a bad habit. Beginner readers practice sub-vocalization. For secondary school students who need to digest large quantities of material, sub-vocalization should be limited and not the norm. In other words, there is a time and place for sub vocalizing. But in most cases, it limits a secondary school students’ speed to 350 words per minute or lower, because that is about as fast as you talk (Linares, 2002). On this basis, sub-vocalization is a bad reading habit that should not be encouraged whether at home, in school or elsewhere in society especially among secondary school students with learning disabilities.

Another bad reading habit that should not equally be encouraged among secondary school students with learning disabilities is re-reading. This is the act of re-reading words, phrases, or entire sentences out of habit and not because of need. It is also called regression and more especially tagged “a pretty straightforward reading speed demon” by *Speedy Eyes* (2016). Sometimes, it is necessary to re-read something, especially when the reader wants to repair understanding. However, habitual, unnecessary regressing really slows down a reader’s reading rate. Linares (2002) explained that frequent re-reading (because an



unknown word or phrase appears) makes readers to go slower than they need to, and also causes other cognitive abilities within an individual to slow down. He further stressed that re-reading certain portion of a text often does not make room for efficient reading. This actually should occur at the pre-reading preview time, or after a really efficient first read.

Word-by-word reading or fixation, another bad reading habit, often occurs with polysyllabic words. Many adults recognized 1,000's of words immediately, and many of these words are polysyllabic in nature such as "hospital" and "hippopotamus". However, many poor readers actually read each polysyllabic word each time they see it. That means they "decode" the already known word and really do not have to, as they know it and can recognize it immediately. Word-by-word calling is a bad reading habit that hinders comprehension. Proficient readers have mastered several words and quickly pass over them as soon as their eye and brain/memory recognize them. This is called automatic word recognition, a prerequisite for reading fluency.

Till date, many secondary school students with learning disabilities engage in other special poor reading habits such as (a) reversals (b) finger pointing and lip moving, (c) halting/dysfluent oral reading, and (d) poor silent reading as described by Lerner and Kline (2006). This calls for concern among stakeholders in education of students with learning disabilities. Reversal refers to the tendency to reverse letters or words that are different only in direction, such as *b* for *d*, *no* for *on*, or *saw* for *was*. Inversions are another common type of error, such as *u* for *n*. Such readers may even write backward, producing "mirror writing". At the beginning stages of reading, such errors merely show that a reader lacks experience with letters and words. But, during the secondary school years reversals indicate a disability interfering with reading progress and requiring specific remediation (Lerner & Kline, 2006).

Finger pointing and lip moving when one is reading are other bad habits among secondary school students with learning disabilities that should not be ignored. Both habits inhibit fluency and reduce comprehension as well as encourage word-by-word



reading, vocalization or sub-vocalization (Lerner & Kline, 2006). Moreover, in terms of reading speed, and accuracy, many students with learning disabilities often read in a very hesitant, non-fluent, halting manner. By so doing, these students create opportunities for teachers to interrupt them during a read aloud activity, much more than they do interrupt their peers without learning disabilities, thereby discouraging oral reading fluency (Lerner & Kline, 2006).

Most purposeful oral reading of adults is silent. Therefore, the moment a secondary school student fails to maintain this *status quo*, reading comprehension will be affected. The habit of inability to read silently should also be discouraged. Other reading habits that should be discouraged are: reading everything at the same rate (regardless of the purpose for reading and the difficulty level of the material), reading while lying down on the bed or chewing gum when reading, dozing off or sleeping while reading, reading and singing/talking, reading with ear piece in the ear for listening to music and easily getting tired while reading. On the basis of these bad reading habits, teachers and parents should lead the campaign of proffering solutions to these habits.

### **Teachers' Role in Promoting Reading Habits of Students with Learning Disabilities**

A critical component of promoting good reading habits of students with learning disabilities lies in the hands of teachers of these students. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers can provide apt *panacea* to the problem of poor reading habits among students with learning disabilities by doing the following:

- i. Using concrete reading materials that the students can interact with.
- ii. Providing sufficient time for students to read.
- iii. Giving fewer passages to read if students are typically slow readers.
- iv. Providing opportunities for peer tutoring.
- v. Using a multi-sensory (auditory, visual, kinesthetic and tactile) teaching approach.

- vi. Using cooperative learning instructional approach which permits students to utilize their strengths within a group.
- vii. Breaking longer presentations into shorter segments.
- viii. Encouraging students to tape record fluent talk and lectures. This will serve as model of accurate fluent reading practice.
- ix. Encouraging students to create their own stories.
- x. Reinforcing positive reading habits when exhibited by students with learning disabilities.
- xi. Allowing students to select the preferred texts to read by themselves which are in accordance with their interests.
- xii. Allowing students to review books or stories that are in line with their interest.
- xiii. Equipping the school library with stimulating books that are in line with the students' interest.
- xiv. Allowing the students to dramatise the story by acting out role of each character in such story.
- xv. Exposing students to reading aloud strategy so that they can come to understand the power and beauty of learning to read.

Furthermore, Lerner and Kline (2006) and Ormrod (2006) reported that from the behaviourists (such as B. F. Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, J. B. Watson and Edward Thorndike) perspective, behaviours are learned and inappropriate behaviours can be replaced with more appropriate behaviours. For instance, a student who yells out in class can be taught to raise his/her hand; even a puppy that wets the floor can be taught to scratch the door to be let out. This principle can be applied in promoting reading habits. Therefore, teachers should explore all possible teaching considerations when dealing with bad reading habits among students with learning disabilities. In addition to the points identified earlier, Lerner and Kline (2006) suggested the following:

- i. Using phonics instruction to reinforce the pronunciation of the confusing word.



- ii. Using memory devices. For example, show that the lowercase *b* goes in the same direction as the capital *B* and that one can be superimposed on the other.
- iii. Watching out for extensive finger pointing which may be a symptom of visual difficulties. In some cases, the student may need an eye examination.
- iv. Ensuring that the material is not too difficult.
- v. Allowing that students first read the material silently.
- vi. Assuring the students that the teacher will not interrupt while they are reading.
- vii. Providing students the necessary direct motivation that they would require to be able to read silently. For example, you might stress the information that the student should find in the text, and provide opportunity for discussion, questions and answers immediately after the silent reading so that the student will see it as a meaningful activity.

### Parents' Role in Promoting Reading Habits of Students with Learning Disabilities

Parents remain one of the most important resources for the educational development of these all students especially, those with learning disabilities. This is because parents spend ample time with their children at home. So, parents can promote the reading habits of their children with learning disabilities through:

- i. Ensuring that their children engage in activities that will boost good reading habits and literacy. For instance, students can play reading games like scrabble and enjoy creative expressions through music and arts.
- ii. Ensuring that useful reading materials and other educative resources like electronic learning materials are provided for the students at home.
- iii. Monitoring the use of informative and educative reading materials for sustained good reading habits.
- iv. Using specific strategies to boost students with learning disabilities' self-confidence in literacy.
- v. Reinforcing positive reading habits exhibited by the students at home.



- vi. Guiding and modelling reading activities for the students at home. Parents need to cultivate the habit of reading at home and letting their children see them engage in varied literacy activities. As children observe their parents read with good reading habits, they will develop interest in applying good reading habits.
- vii. Forming strong partnership with children to improve their reading habits. For example, parents can read to students with learning disabilities at home. They can engage students with learning disabilities in reading activities like building vocabulary, story-telling and pronunciation drills. By so doing, students with learning disabilities can be assisted to develop and sustain good reading habits.
- viii. Monitoring students' completion of reading assignments for school.
- ix. Discouraging students from the use of languages that are different from the ones used in school.
- x. Allowing the students to engage in extra-curricular or out-of-school literacy activities.
- xi. Helping the students to develop positive attitude towards reading and reading activities. A student who is well adjusted at home, and who has a favourable home condition and peer relationships will have positive attitude toward reading. His positive attitude will foster progress in learning to read and negative attitudes result in poor reading habits.
- xii. Stacking the home library with books or informational texts such as newspapers, magazines, books, television guides, telephone directories and catalogues that the students have interest in.
- xiii. Identifying the students' strengths and using such to compensate for their weakness in reading activities.
- xiv. Allowing students ample time to read at home.
- xv. Having the belief that their children with learning disabilities can acquire and utilise good reading habits as well as succeed in literacy activity.



- xvi. Providing warm atmosphere for reading at home and responding to the questions posed by the students with learning disabilities at home.

### Conclusion

The acquisition and utilization of good reading habits by students with learning disabilities have been and continue to be the focus of reading instruction and learning disabilities as a field of study. This is because every meaningful academic endeavour is closely linked with reading efficiency and effectiveness by all learners. Hardly is there a single endeavour that a student can embark on which does not require the demonstration of good reading habits. Therefore, this paper concisely discussed what reading habits are, the common bad reading habits displayed by secondary school students with learning disabilities and solutions to bad reading habits. Effort was also made to explain what the contribution of teachers and parents of students with learning disabilities should be in nurturing good reading habits.

Based on the discussion so far, it is necessary to point out the following recommendations towards promoting the reading habits of secondary school students with learning disabilities:

- i. Students should be made aware of their habits and to understand how they inhibit reading progress.
- ii. Teachers of secondary school students with learning disabilities especially those who exhibit bad reading habits should not stigmatize them, but should encourage them to imbibe good reading habits through teacher's positive attitude.
- iii. Parents should serve as role model, by demonstrating good reading habits and encouraging their children to develop same.
- iv. Students with learning disabilities should cultivate positive attitude towards reading and endeavour to improve on their current reading habits for better academic performance and proper social integration.

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