

## IMPACT OF READING STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN AN INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

*The study examined the impact of reading strategies on students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised 10,235 of JSS1 students, and 300 English Language teachers. Simple random sampling and Purposive sampling techniques were used to draw 125 students and 25 English language teachers. The instrument for data collection was Reading Strategies for Teaching Special Needs Students in an Inclusive English Language Classroom Questionnaire (RSTSNSIELC). The instrument was validated by two experts in Arts Education (English Language Unit) and one expert from Science Education Department (Measurement and Evaluation Unit), University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. In all, it was discovered that effective use of certain reading strategies for teaching reading to students with special needs could be very helpful in enhancing their reading abilities as well as helping the English language teachers in overcoming the challenges they encounter during teaching and learning of reading in an inclusive English language education classroom. It was recommended that English language teachers in secondary schools, especially in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State should be exposed to training and workshops on how to especially teach students with special needs.*

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**Keywords:** English language; reading; reading strategies; special needs; inclusive education

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### Introduction

English language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world with over 1.5 billion people speaking it as a first or second language. English language is not only the medium of instruction, but it is also taught as one of the core subjects in secondary schools in Nigeria. It is a vital tool in making learners to become relevant and meet up with the competitiveness in the world. There are four basic skills in teaching and learning of English language. They are speaking, listening, reading and writing. Harerazi & Irawan (2020), state that reading is one of the language skills that are vital in the study of English language. These

four skills are divided into two (the receptive and the productive skills). The receptive skill is made up of listening and reading, while the productive skill is made up of speaking and writing. For one to be called a literate of any language such a person must learn to read the language. Thus, it is easy for a child to acquire the skills of listening and speaking, whereas, the skills of reading and writing are learnt. In other words, a child can easily listen and then thereafter speak a language without the assistance of a literate person (parents or teacher) whereas, the skills of reading and writing cannot be acquired, but it must be learnt through the help of an educated parents or better still a teacher formally in a school setting. Beginning reading is a solid foundation in which almost all subsequent learning is built upon. Thus, the children need a solid foundation. The solid foundation of the educational system is primary education. Reading is an indispensable tool in teaching and learning of English language.

Reading is a very vital aspect of English language. The reading skills of students generally need to be developed via some reading skills. Teaching reading to students with special needs requires additional support and adapted strategies, especially when the teaching and learning should be done in inclusive education classroom, where all the students are allowed to learn and achieve their full potential when given the necessary support and opportunities, in order to face the challenge in the global world that is competitive in nature. Reading is considered as a language activity that involves the cognitive processes related to language performance. It is an interactive process between a reader and a text (Imran, Firman & Raudhatunnisa, 2020). On the other hand, reading is described as the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Maxon (2009), states that reading is one of the key skills in language learning. Reading is all about looking at printed words with the purpose of discovering the information encoded by the author. Reading entails internalizing the meaning of the writer as well as the interpretation of the reader so that he can think, predict, question and evaluate. So reading enriches the thinking process of an individual's brain.

Reading skill improves other language skills (Haerazi, Prayati & Vikasari, 2019). Reading is described as a receptive skill, as it enhances the understanding of what is written. It is essential for the acquisition and use of knowledge even from lower basic level (Okoye & Ene 2011). It is even more crucial in the present information age. Reading and writing are fundamental to literacy, more than the other two skills; reading is critical to the success of any educational endeavour and it is essential for thriving both in and out of school. Uwatt & Nta (2010) are of the opinion that the importance of reading cannot be over emphasized in the life of a learner as the bulk of knowledge which is stored in the written form is assessed through reading. Therefore, inability to read inhibits learning in any field of study. Ability to read can be said to be the basis of the education system. It is at the root of the success of any educational enterprise. To this effect, the National Policy on Education emphasises that reading should be introduced to pupils at the primary level, usually, learners aged 6 to 11 years plus, since, its basic goals is to inculcate in learners permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively, (FRN, 2014) in as much as reading should be introduced in the primary level, the teaching of reading should be consolidated in the secondary school. Secondary education provides a vital link between the primary and tertiary education. If reading is necessary for the acquisition and use of knowledge (Okoye & Ene

2011), secondary schools students need to be well grounded in reading skills to be able to meet up with the challenges of secondary education, external examinations, higher education and successful living outside school and in the work places and in the world at large that is competitive in nature. The deficiency in reading is indeed a global challenge that affects both the normal and special needs students. The report of the Nations International Children's emergency Fund in 2015 cited in Otache (2020) showed that about 250 million children in the world can neither read nor write. More so, there are reports abounds about the prevalence poor reading culture in Africa, generally, and in Nigeria particularly (Haliru, Abdulkarim, Dogara, & Dangam, 2015). Teaching reading to normal students in a normal classroom has not been an easy task, it becomes more tedious when taught to students with special needs in an inclusive language education classroom. WEAC Chief Examiner's report (2020) shows that there is poor performance of students in English Language generally and comprehension specifically. The Chief Examiner stated that this poor performance might as a result of poor reading skill in students. he therefore, suggested that teachers should help candidates by teaching them how to read, understand and interpret the requirements of questions set, whether they are essay, comprehension or summary. The examiner suggested that candidates should endeavour to improve on their vocabulary and grammar in the English Language through extensive reading, among others.

Teaching reading to students with special needs is much more challenging. This is due to the fact that they need extra attention from parents, teachers, therapists, and assistants in any learning being carried out. In addition, children with special needs have limitations, which can be physical, intellectual, social, or emotional, that have a major impact on the growth and development process as compared to their age mates who are normal (Winarsih, 2013). The Federal Government of Nigeria being fully aware of the importance of education to all, incorporated special needs education into the National Policy on Education. Special Education according to FRN (2014) in the National Policy on Education is a customized educational programme, designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for. Special needs persons include the speech and language impairment, among other categories. Special needs students in the category of speech and language impairment may have language or learning disorder known as dyslexia or dysphasia. Dyslexia is a learning disorder characterized by difficulty in reading. On the other hand, dysphasia is a language disorder that affects the ability to produce and understand spoken language; it can cause reading and speech problems. Dyslexia is mainly associated with language problems such as reading, writing, and spelling although people with dyslexia might also experience difficulties with vision, memory and/or orientation. Some research (Snowling & Hulme, 2012) asserted that dyslexic children have difficulties learning to read accurately and with adequate speed. It is stipulated in the National Policy on Education that persons with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services in schools which normal persons attend, in age appropriate general education classes directly supervised by general teachers (FRN, 2014). One of the aims of inclusive education is to provide access to education for all persons, in an inclusive setting. Although, it is disheartening that the provision of special education services are not being fully implemented in public secondary schools in the country.

Inclusive education is a system of education that cater for the special needs of pupils and students with visual, auditory and hearing impairment, mental retardation, emotional disorder, speech and language impairment, physical and health impairment as well as learning disabilities, among others (FRN 2014). Ajuwon (2008) describe inclusion or inclusive education as the philosophy and practice for educating children with special needs in general education settings. Inclusive education is understood differently by practitioners, government, parents, disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and other key stakeholders. This is evident at all levels, and affects the acceptance, design, implementation and quality of the entire process. It is best described as provision of equal educational opportunities for all categories of learners despite their shortcomings. Inclusive education is a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and equality in education for all children who have been excluded from education for the reason of disabilities (Christopher & Elizabeth, 2012). The Nigeria National Policy on Education recognizes the importance of inclusive education and emphasizes the need for equal access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities and other special needs. The policy, takes a comprehensive approach to inclusive education (FRN, 2014). The policy on inclusive education emphasizes that every Nigerian child has access to quality education, regardless of their abilities. Also, the policy acknowledges the existence of learners with special needs. It highlights the importance of providing appropriate support and accommodations to meet their individual learning requirements. Most importantly, the policy encourages the development of a curriculum that is flexible and is capable of taking care of the diverse learning needs of all learners. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

Incorporating some strategies in the teaching and learning of reading to students with special needs in an inclusive education classroom will enhance their reading ability. Strategies that can be effective in teaching reading to special needs students will focus on their unique needs, learning styles and abilities. Some strategies that can be incorporated into the teaching and learning of reading to secondary school students in an inclusive education classroom include the following:

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP):** As every class is dynamic in nature so is every learner in the classroom environment, with varied abilities and personalities. There should be a review on each student's Individualized Education Plan, to understand their specific needs and goals, which should be used as a guide to for designing a customized reading programme. Differentiated instruction tailors instruction to meet the specific needs of each student.

**Phonic Approach:** This approach teaches word recognition through learning grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) associations. The students learn vowels, consonants and blend and learn to sound out words by combining sounds and blending them into words. By associating speech sounds with letters the student learn to recognise new and unfamiliar words.

**Visualisation:** This has to do with teacher's ability to create mental pictures in the mind of the students. Ways of carrying out this strategy includes use of audio visual aids diagrams, mind maps and modelling. A research study conducted by Dahle, (2017) examined the effects of visualization reading strategy on the reading comprehension of sixth=grade special

education students with reading difficulties. The result of the findings revealed that visualization improves the reading skills and ability of special needs students with reading difficulties.

**Cooperative Learning:** This learning strategy involves a small group of students of different learning abilities that collaboratively work together on a particular task. The task can be reading a passage from the students' text or from literature. It encourages the students to support one another and achieve a tangible result.

**Multisensory Learning:** this involves the use of multiple senses, which includes the sense of sight, sound, touch and movement to foster the students' learning ability to read. The teacher may introduce visual aids like pictures or diagrams to understand some concepts.

**Assistive Technology:** The use of technology can be very valuable in enhancing the teaching and learning of reading to special needs students. Technology can be used to form interactive and engaging lessons like educational games or simulations. Technology can as well be used in designing audio books or speech recognition software, which are very valuable and supportive in assisting the students in their reading comprehension and fluency.

**Peer Tutoring:** This involves pairing students with various abilities to work together on a particular reading task. For example, a student who has achieved reading fluency can be paired with a student who still struggles to read. The tutor can provide one-on-one instruction and support to the student with reading difficulty, while also improving his or her own leadership and communication skills.

**Provide frequent breaks:** The English language teacher should ensure that reading tasks are broken into smaller, manageable chunks to avoid the students being overwhelmed by the lengthy passages. The students should be allowed to take breaks or engage in short physical activities to maintain focus.

**Employ the Use of Repetition and Reinforcement:** The use of repetition and reinforcement can go a long way in enhancing the reading ability of students with reading difficulty. Special needs students may benefit from repeated exposure to concepts or vocabulary. Learning should be reinforced by reviewing previously read.

**Promote a Positive and inclusive Reading Environment:** The English Language teacher should create an enabling and encouraging environment for reading. Students should be encouraged to share their thoughts, opinions and questions about what they are reading.

**Collaboration with other Professionals:** the teacher should work closely with special education teachers, reading specialists, and other professionals involved in the student's education to develop personalized reading strategies and interventions. These strategies when gainfully employed in the teaching and learning of reading will go a long way in enhancing the reading abilities of special needs students. Some researchers have discovered that people with dyslexia can compensate for their reading difficulties (Birch & Chase, 2004). These researchers indicated that the use of some strategies helps individuals with dyslexia to overcome their word decoding problems and, to a certain extent, like their peers, they can

eventually achieve reading comprehension levels (Corkett, Parrila, & Hein, 2006; Deacon, Parrila, & Kirby, 2006; Murray & Wren, 2003). Research also has it that the proper use of reading strategies enable the learners with dyslexia in grades 9-12 to comprehend the texts they read (Corkett, Parrila, & Hein, 2006; Deacon, Parrila, & Kirby, 2006; Murray & Wren, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Poor reading culture is a prevalence occurrence among secondary school students. The deficiency in reading is indeed a global challenge which affects both normal and special needs students. Report abounds in literature of the prevalence poor reading culture among students both in Nigeria, and Africa at large. The Chief Examiner's Report in 2020 also confirms that there is poor performance of students due to poor reading skill. This poor reading is seen in normal students, as well as special needs students. It therefore, becomes imperative to employ some strategies in the teaching of reading to special needs students, so as to equip them to be able to face the challenges of poor performance caused by poor reading skill. Employing certain reading strategies can go a long way in curbing the problem of poor reading habit among secondary school students, especially those with special needs. This study sought to fill the gap teaching reading anyhow, thereby employing certain reading strategies in the teaching reading to secondary school students in an inclusive English Language classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this study is to describe the impact of reading strategies on students with special needs in an inclusive English language education classroom. Specifically, this study sought to discover:

1. the various reading strategies that can be used in teaching reading to students with special needs in an inclusive language education classroom
2. the impact of reading strategies on students with special need in an inclusive English Language education classroom
3. the challenges encountered by the English language teachers in teaching reading to students with special needs

### **Research Questions**

The research questions formulated for this study include:

1. What are the reading strategies that can be used in teaching reading to students with special needs?
2. What is the impact of reading strategies on special needs students in an inclusive English Language Education classroom?
3. What are the challenges encountered by the English language teachers in teaching reading to students with special needs?

### Methodology

**Design:** This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design is a type of design that deals with describing in a systematic manner the characteristics or features or facts about a given population. The element could be individual, event or object (Nworgu, 2015). In this study, this design enables the researchers to describe the impact of reading strategies on students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom.

**Participants:** The participants of the study are all the junior secondary school one (JSS1) students and all the English Language teachers in teaching JSS1 students in the public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone. The population of JSS1 students in Nsukka Education Zone is 10,235, while that of the English language teachers are 300. The sample size for this study is 125 JSS1 students and 25 English language teachers. Simple random sampling was used to randomly select 6 secondary schools from the 3 local government areas that made up Nsukka Education Zone. Then purposive sampling technique was used to draw the sample size. This is because it is not all the schools that have students with special needs in their schools. Therefore, the schools that are inclusive in nature were purposively selected for the purpose of this study.

**Instrument:** The instrument for data collection is Reading Strategies for Teaching Special Needs Students in an Inclusive English Language Classroom questionnaire (RSTSNSIELC), which were used to gather quantitative data on reading strategies used for special needs students, the impact of reading strategies on students with special needs and the challenges faced by the English language teachers while teaching students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom. The RSTSNSIELC developed by the researchers has 28 items with 4 point likert response options of Strongly Agreed (SA)-4; Agreed (A)-3; Disagreed (D)-2; Strongly Disagreed (SD)-1. The instrument was validated by three experts, two experts from Arts Education Department (English Education Unit) and one expert from Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation Unit). The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained.

**Procedure:** The researchers with the permission of the school authority administered the questionnaire to the respondents made up of the teachers and students. The researchers collected the instrument from the respondents when they were done. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, and the acceptance level for the decisions was 2.5.

## Results

**Table 1:** Mean and Standard Deviation of the responses on Reading Strategies that are used in teaching of reading to students with special needs in an inclusive English language education classroom

S/N	Item statement	Students		Decision	Teachers		Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD		$\bar{X}$	SD	
1.	Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should be applied when teaching reading to special needs students	3.59	0.49	Accept	3.96	0.2	Accept
2.	Phonic Approach is a good strategy for teaching students with special needs	3.40	0.49	Accept	3.92	0.27	Accept
3.	Visualisation is a good strategy to be used in the teaching reading to special needs students	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept
4.	Cooperative Learning strategy should be applied while teaching reading to special needs students	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.96	0.2	Accept
5.	Multisensory Learning is good to be used in teaching reading to students with special needs students	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.92	0.27	Accept
6.	The teacher should teaching reading to special needs students by making use of Assistive Technology	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.96	0.2	Accept
7.	The teaching of reading to the students with special needs should be done through Peer Tutoring	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.84	0.37	Accept
8.	The teacher should ensure that reading tasks are broken into smaller, manageable chunks Provide frequent breaks to enhance and maintain the students' focus	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.84	0.37	Accept
9.	The teacher should employ the Use of Repetition and Reinforcement while teaching reading to special needs students	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.8	0.40	Accept
10.	Positive and inclusive Reading Environment should be promoted by the teacher	3.79	0.40	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept



11.	The teacher should collaboration with other Professionals such as special education teachers, reading specialists, and other professionals involved in the student's education to develop personalized reading strategies.	3.79	0.40	Accept	3.84	0.37	Accept
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Table 1 shows that the highest mean and the lowest mean for the responses by the students are 3.8 and 3.4, while that of the teachers are 3.96 and 3.8 respectively. The result in Table 1 accepted the fact that there numerous reading strategies used on students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom with a total mean and standard deviation of 3.73 and 0.32 respectively.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the responses on impact reading strategies on special needs students' reading comprehension and language skills in an inclusive English language Education classroom.**

S/N	Item Statement	Students		Decision	Teachers		Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD		$\bar{X}$	SD	
1.	Reading strategies helps special needs students, such as those with dyslexia to better understand and comprehend text.	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept
2.	The application of reading strategies enhances special needs students' vocabulary and language skills.	4	0	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept
3.	Word repetition, graphic organizers help students with special needs to expand their vocabulary and improve their understanding of language.	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept
4.	The use of reading strategies encourage students to actively engage with the text, ask questions and make connections with what is read.	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.72	0.45	Accept
5.	Reading strategies empower special needs students to become independent readers.	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.76	0.43	Accept
6.	Strategies such as self monitoring, self-correction and using assistive technology enable students to identify and correct errors, thereby improving their reading fluency and overall independence in reading.	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.88	0.33	Accept
7.	Reading strategies help students with special needs to build confidence in	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.72	0.45	Accept

	their ability to read and comprehend text.						
8.	The uses of some reading strategies help students with special needs to develop lifelong love for reading.	3.6	0.49	Accept	3.76	0.43	Accept
9.	Reading strategies are tailored to meet the individual needs of special needs students.	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.84	0.37	Accept

Table 2 shows that the highest mean and the lowest mean for the responses by the students are 4 and 3.6, while that of the teachers are 3.88 and 3.72 respectively. The result in Table 2 shows that the acceptance level of the impact of strategies used on students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom is high with a total mean and standard deviation of 3.71 and 0.22 respectively. Therefore, the result shows that reading strategies used on special needs students in an inclusive English language classroom have impact on their reading comprehension and language skills.

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the responses on the challenges encountered by the English language teachers in teaching reading to special needs students in an inclusive English language classroom.**

S/N	Item statement	Students		Decision	Teachers		Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD		$\bar{X}$	SD	
1.	Teachers are faced with the challenge of time allocation during teaching.	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.79	0.40	Accept
2.	Teachers are faced with the challenge of completing the scheme of work for the term	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.79	0.40	Accept
3.	English language teachers find it difficult to manage both students with special needs and the normal students	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.79	0.40	Accept
4.	Lack of necessary needed assistive technology hinders effective and learning of reading to the special needs students	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.79	3.82	Accept
5.	English language teachers find teaching both normal students and students with special needs too stressful	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.8	0.40	Accept
6.	Difficulty in adapting the curriculum in an inclusive English language classroom	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.8	0.40	Accept
7.	Lack of skills for teaching students with special needs	3.8	0.40	Accept	3.8	0.40	Accept

8.	Fear that students with special needs will reduce the progress of the normal students	4	0	Accept	4	0	Accept
<b>Total mean</b>		<b>3.82</b>	<b>3.82</b>	<b>Accept</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>1.23</b>	<b>Accept</b>

Table 3 shows that the highest mean and the lowest mean for the responses by the students are 4 and 3.8, while that of the teachers are 4 and 3.791 respectively. The result in Table 3 accepted the fact that there are challenges encountered by English language teachers when teaching reading to students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom with a total mean and standard deviation of 3.82 and 0.14 for students and 3.82 and 1.23 for teachers respectively. Therefore, the result shows that English Language teachers encounter some problems while teaching reading to students with special needs in an inclusive English language classroom.

### Discussion of findings

Research question one identifies various reading strategies that can be used in teaching reading to students with special needs in Nsukka Education of Enugu State. The study revealed that some reading strategies that can enhance the reading skills of special needs students in an inclusive English Language classroom include the; individualized education plan, phonic approach, visualization, cooperative learning, multisensory learning, peer tutoring, among others. The study is in line with the study of Awada (2014) that there some strategies that are effective in improving the reading comprehension of dyslexic learners of English Language. More so, the study agrees with the study of Anada, (2021) who stated that there various strategies which English Language teachers can use in teaching special needs students.

Research question three identifies the challenges encountered by the English Language teachers in teaching reading to students with special needs in an inclusive English Language classroom. Some of these challenges include; English language teachers being faced with the challenge of time allocation during teaching; the challenge of completing the scheme of work; difficulty in managing both normal and special needs students; lack of necessary needed assistive technology; lack of skills for teaching the students with special needs among others. This study agrees with the study of Ananda (2021), who discovered that there challenges encountered by English Language teachers in teaching special needs students in English Language classroom.

### Conclusion

This study thoroughly examined the impact of reading strategies on special needs students in an English language classroom in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. The findings of this study show that reading strategies when applied appropriately enhance the reading ability of students with special needs. Again, the findings of this study reveal that English language teachers encounter some problems while teaching reading to special needs students in an English language inclusive classroom.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. English language teachers in secondary schools, especially in Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State should be exposed to training and workshops on how to especially teach students with special needs in an inclusive English Language classroom.
2. Government should make adequate provisions for needed assistive technology.

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