

UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

**THE ZIMBABWE BULLETIN
OF TEACHER EDUCATION**

DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

About the Contributors

- 1 Dr Peggy Doris Siyakwazi and Mr Emmanuel Dengu were lecturers in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Zimbabwe.
- 2 Ms Mukono, T.T. and Mr Tambo, E.M. Z. are lecturers in the Department of Maths and Sciences, University of Zimbabwe.
- 3 Mrs J.J. Mavuna is a lecturer in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Zimbabwe.
- 4 Mr Petros Pashapa is a lecturer at Mkoba Teachers' College, Gweru.

The Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education

Volume 9 No 1 MARCH 2000

ISSN NO-1022-3800

CONTENTS

- Factors in the Career Choices of Zimbabwean Sixth Form Students.**
Siyakwazi P.G. & Dengu E. 1 - 11
- Secondary School Pupils' and Teachers' Perceptions of Context-led Teaching and Learning of Science.**
Mukono T.T. and Tambo, E.M.Z. 12 - 27
- Levels of Difficulty of English Texts Used by Second Language English Speaking Children.**
Mavuna, J.J. 28 - 47
- C.D.S: Current Practices and Imperatives for Change.**
Pashapa, P. 48 - 63

**An Investigation into the Levels of Difficulty
of English Texts Used By Second Language
English Speaking Children at Grade Two Level
in Harare's High Density Government
Primary Schools.**

Mavuna, J. J.

Department of Teacher Education, University of Zimbabwe

Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to assess the level of difficulty of English texts used by grade two primary school pupils whose first language is not English. The study targeted 98 government high density primary schools in Harare, from which eight were randomly sampled. From a total of 1440 grade two pupils, 320 (22,2%) participated in this study. The study's main question was: What is the level of difficulty of grade two English texts used by second language English speaking children? Out of the four locally produced reading schemes, two of them - the **New Zimbabwe Primary English (NZPE)** and the **Ventures English Alive (VEA)** were used because they are the most commonly utilized. Two readability (text difficulty assessment) measures, the Fry Graph and Cloze Procedure, were used to assess the level of difficulty of the NZPE and the VEA reading schemes. Results from the study showed that both the NZPE and the VEA texts were difficult for grade two second language English speaking children.*

Introduction

Reading is an important means by which both children and adults access information. In the school situation, the ability to read is directly related to children's overall educational performance. A child's ability to read in English is particularly important in the Zimbabwean context because English is the medium of instruction from grade four onwards.

English in general and reading in English in particular, becomes a tool for accessing other subjects in the school curriculum. Children's educational success is thus tied to their reading success. This relationship can only be realized if and when readers understand reading materials.

Failure to understand reading materials is, therefore, associated with poor academic achievement because reading is a "service" tool for accessing other subjects in the school curriculum. Given this important role, the need to ensure that there is a correct match between reading materials and the reader's reading ability cannot be overemphasised. Ensuring that text levels of difficulty match readers' reading abilities is an issue that those tasked with teaching children how to read, particularly those involved in teaching beginning reading, have to grapple with.

Background

Children's reading problems may be attributed to a number of factors.

These include:

- lack of motivation,
- inadequate sight vocabulary,
- ineffective reading methods,
- negative attitudes towards print,
- unavailability of good reading models,
- inadequately developed reading skills and,
- insufficient reading resources.

Another important factor could be a mismatch between the level of difficulty of reading materials and a reader's reading ability. Observations made by the researcher as a classroom practitioner as well as those made by Seke Teachers' College pre-service students during their 1997 field experience seem to suggest that infant children appear to encounter more problems in reading materials in their second language than they do with their first language. These observations are not specific to any particular English text, but appear to be a general problem concerning English texts in use in infant grades (grades one to three) in Zimbabwean primary schools.

Zimbabwean children are introduced to formal reading in their first language as well reading in a second language - English, during their first year in primary school. The English texts used in schools are locally produced and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture through its Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). One would, therefore, assume that these texts are suitable for the grade levels that they are intended for.

Furthermore, children are in most cases also exposed to uniform reading materials regardless of their interests, experiences, or reading abilities. Classroom practitioners seem to play a very minimal role, if any at all in identifying appropriate texts for their grade levels. Funding appears to be a key consideration when it comes to purchasing texts for children. The apparent absence of text selection processes in most schools, coupled with the seemingly unquestioning acceptance of whatever texts a school has to offer by the majority of classroom practitioners, negatively impacts on readability. Such a scenario seems to suggest that the level of difficulty of reading materials, in as much as it impacts on children's educational achievement in general and children's reading in particular, is not an issue that those involved with children's reading have to grapple with. This is an unfortunate situation.

In the short term, a mismatch between reading materials and the reader's reading ability negatively influences the child's performance at school. This results in ultimate failure, because reading is a service tool for accessing the school curriculum. In the long term, this mismatch may be evidenced by a negative attitude towards print.

Too difficult reading materials impact on readers in a number of ways. If the reading materials are difficult, hence incomprehensible, then reading ceases to be a meaningful activity. Frustration may set in, bringing with it a whole host of negative effects. Fear or hatred of reading and school may result. Worse still, failure in reading may trigger feelings of inadequacy - a situation which may adversely affect a child's personality development (Hergenhahn, 1994; Meyer, Moore and Viljoen, 1990).

Thus, subjecting children to difficult reading materials may have a lasting negative influence on the child's confidence and attitude towards reading during and after school.

The Problem

A child's ability to read in English is particularly important in Zimbabwe. This is dictated by the fact that English is the medium of instruction from grade four onwards. However, despite Shona or Ndebele being the official medium of instruction for grades one to three in Zimbabwe, it is not uncommon to find infant teachers violating this policy. Not only do some of them teach in English or excessively code-switch from a vernacular language to English right from grade one (Ndamba, 1999), they also introduce children to reading in a second language (English) at this very early stage of formal school instruction. Reading in English becomes a tool to access the rest of the curriculum, with the exception of local languages. Failure to read in English, therefore, signals not only educational doom but may also bring with it the onset of a lasting negative attitude towards reading. Such a situation could hamper the efforts of those people toiling endlessly to develop a reading culture among Zimbabwean children. It is in this context that the level of difficulty of English texts used by grade two second language English speakers was investigated.

Methodology

A quantitative research design was used for this study. Two readability assessment measures - the Fry Graph and Cloze Procedure, were used. The Fry Graph is a text based readability measure. It uses two variables -vocabulary and sentence length, to determine levels of difficulty of reading materials. Cloze Procedure on the other hand, is a reader based readability measure in which readers' performance in reading comprehension is used as a basis for determining levels of difficulty of reading materials.

Subjects

From the 98 government primary schools in Harare's high density suburbs that were listed in the 1996 telephone directory, 8 (14.1%) schools with a population of 1440 grade two pupils were randomly selected. This sample comprised 200 (62.5%) females and 120 (37.5%) males. The subjects were considered homogeneous in terms of their ages, school resources as well as their rather limited exposure to English when compared to their counterparts in the government primary schools in low density suburbs.

Instruments

There are numerous readability measures developed by psychologists, researchers and classroom practitioners for use in the assessment of levels of difficulty of reading materials. These include formal and informal measures as well as objective and subjective readability measures (Harrison, 1980; Meek, Warlow and Barton, 1977). In this study two instruments were used. These were the Fry Graph - a text based readability assessment measure and Cloze Procedure - a reader based readability assessment measure which comprises a blank filling comprehension exercise.

The Fry Graph

To measure the level of difficulty of reading materials, the Fry Graph relies on two variables -vocabulary and sentence length (Banks and Clegg, 1990; Harrison, 1980). To determine readability using the Fry Graph, one follows a number of steps. First, three passages, each with a hundred words, are randomly selected from a text. Second, the number of sentences as well as the number of syllables in these passages are counted and the average for each variable computed. Third, the average number of sentences and syllables is plotted on the Fry Graph. The level of difficulty of the materials is determined by identifying the point where the two averages intersect, after which, one simply reads off the grade level of the particular text.

Cloze Procedure

To incorporate reader factors in readability assessment, Cloze Procedure was used in this study. Cloze Procedure is a measure of text difficulty based on children's performance in reading comprehension. Four steps were taken in developing Cloze Tests. First, thirteen passages were randomly identified from the NZPE and the VEA reading series - nine from the NZPE and four from the VEA series.

Fewer passages were taken from the VEA texts because this series is characterised by very short stories, with dialogues and pictures predominating. The researcher had, therefore, to combine several passages to meet the minimum requirement of deletions at fifth word intervals, that are required to yield reliable Cloze results.

More passages were taken from the NZPE texts, which comprised more reading content as opposed to the VEA texts, in order to have a balanced assessment of the level of difficulty of these texts. Leaving the first sentence of each passage intact, the second step was to systematically delete every fifth word in all the passages. The passages were then retyped with the deletions included and numbered. Deletions were made uniform in length to avoid a situation where children guessed the word from the size of the deletion. Finally, for each passage, the instruction "Fill in each blank with a suitable word" was included.

Procedure

The researcher first pilot tested the two instruments. Subjects and reading materials similar to but different from those used in the main study were used. The researcher first conducted a desk analysis of the two reading series - the NZPE and the VEA texts, using the Fry Graph. This was followed by Cloze Tests on grade two children.

The Fry Graph

To determine the levels of difficulty of the English texts used at grade two level using the Fry Graph, six passages, three from the second text of each of the two grade two reading schemes (NZPE and VEA), were randomly selected for readability assessment. The researcher deemed it unnecessary to pilot test all the three texts from each series just to get an indication of the level of difficulty of the texts under investigation.

Pilot testing the use of the Fry Graph was considered necessary to determine whether this readability instrument could be applied to infant grade reading materials.

Cloze Procedure

After the desk analysis of the texts' levels of difficulty, two passages from the second readers of the two reading series other than those used in the main study were randomly selected and pilot tested. Four grade two classes, two from low density and the other two from high density suburban government primary schools were used. Both populations were predominantly black - hence, second language users of English.

Cloze Tests were pilot tested to determine whether or not grade two children were able to work on this type of comprehension exercise. It was also necessary to determine how much time would be required for such an activity in the main study. The instrument could thus be modified if need be before its launch in the main study.

Table 1: Children's Performance in Cloze Tests: Pilot Test Results

Passage	High Density Grade Two Children's Average Scores		Low Density Grade Two Children's Average Scores	
	Average Scores	%	Average Scores	%
NZPE	25.7		47.7	
NZPE	34.4		57.1	
VEA	20.0		61.4	
VEA	36.7		42.9	

Bormuth's (1968) cut off scores were used to determine the level of difficulty of these texts. The score ranges and their associated reading levels indicating the levels at which a reader is operating at, are as follows (Burmeister, 1987; Harrison, 1980; Marzano, Hargety, Valencia and Distefano, 1987; and Karlin and Karlin, 1987):

- 0% to 43% - Frustrational Level,
- 44% to 55% - Instructional Level, and
- 56% to 100% -Independent Level.

Children's average scores within the 0% to 43% are an indication that the reading materials are difficult, and as such , incomprehensible for the readers. Scores within the 44% to 55% range imply that the reading materials are considerably manageable. At this level, reading materials, though comprehensible, may pose some challenges - hence, instruction and assistance from the teacher or a capable adult are called for. Lastly, average percentage scores within the 56% to 100% range indicate that readers are operating at the independent level. At this level the reader can comprehend the materials with little if any difficulty at all. Readers using reading materials pegged at this level of difficult do not require the assistance of the teacher.

Children from the high density primary schools performed at a frustrational level in all the Cloze Tests. These results were an indication that these reading materials were difficult for them. Children from the low density suburban schools on the other hand performed at the independent level in two passages and at the instructional level in one passage. In this last level, children's average scores fell within the frustrational level category by only 0.1%. On the basis of these results, grade two children from low density primary schools comprehended the reading materials -hence, they found the reading materials either manageable or easy.

Results of the Fry Graph and Cloze Procedure

The two instruments - the Fry Graph and Cloze Procedure were administered by the researcher. The first part of the investigation comprised a desk analysis of the two reading schemes using the Fry Graph as a measure of text difficulty. First, thirteen passages, three from each of the three NZPE texts and two from each of the second and third VEA texts were randomly selected. Less passages were taken from the VEA texts because these texts had far less reading content as compared to the content in the NZPE texts. No passages were selected from the first VEA text as this is basically a picture book. Using the Fry Graph, each series' average number of sentences were plotted against the average number of syllables to determine their levels of difficulty.

The desk analysis of the texts' readability was followed by the administration of Cloze Procedure on grade two children. The researcher conducted Cloze Tests on all children in the eight grade two classes sampled for this study , who could read. Before children embarked on the exercise, the researcher highlighted the following aspects pertaining to the activity:

- children were to engage in a writing activity taken from their own readers or those used by other children of their age.
- children had to fill in each blank in the comprehension activity with a suitable word;
- children would not be penalised for misspellings,

- crossing out words if need be would be permitted;
- copying would not be tolerated;
- ample time would be set aside for the activity and,
- children were free to terminate the activity if they so wished, although the researcher expected all children to complete the exercise.

A practice session using different reading materials from those used in the main study was conducted with each class prior to the main activity. The researcher collected the work once children had completed the activity. The work was marked and average percentage scores for each class computed. This same procedure was carried out for all the eight grade two classes involved in this study. Each of the eight grade two classes worked on one Cloze Test except one class, which was randomly selected to work on two Cloze Tests, because there were more Cloze Tests than the number of grade two classes in this study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used in this study. Data collected using the Fry Graph was analysed using frequency counts and means. The average number of sentences and syllables was then plotted on the Fry Graph -giving the grade level at which the reading materials are pegged. Children's performance in Cloze Tests was also analysed using frequency counts, means and percentages. Bormuth's (1968) percentage scores discussed earlier on were used to determine the level of difficulty of English texts used by grade two children. To determine levels of difficulty one can use either verbatim scoring (exact words used in the passage) or synonym scoring (use of any meaningful word that may not be used in the text) may be used.

Harrison (1980) recommends verbatim scoring because he finds it more commonly used, more practical, more reliable, more valid and less time consuming than synonym scoring.

d be permitted;
 he activity and,
 activity if they so
 pected all children to

s from those used in the main
 main activity. The researcher
 the activity. The work was
 a class computed. This same
 classes involved in this study.
 e Cloze Test except one class,
 ze Tests, because there were
 ses in this study.

collected using the Fry Graph
 s. The average number of
 Graph -giving the grade level
 s performance in Cloze Tests
 and percentages. Bormuth's
 used to determine the level of
 ren. To determine levels of
 words used in the passage) or
 may not be used in the text)

because he finds it more
 more valid and less time

He, however, cites research studies by Bormuth (1968) in which a comparison of results where verbatim scoring was used correlated highly with those in which synonym scoring was used. In this study, verbatim scoring was used to determine the level of difficulty of English texts used by grade two second language speakers of English.

Results : Levels of Difficulty of NZPE and VEA Reading Schemes

The study's main question was: What is the level of difficulty of grade two English texts used by second language English speaking children?

Results for this study emerged from two sources: a desk analysis of the readability of two grade two reading schemes (NZPE and VEA) using the Fry Graph as a readability measure, and children's performance in Cloze Tests (comprehension exercises drawn from the two reading schemes) as measures of text difficulty.

Results from the Fry Graph showed that the NZPE texts had a level of difficulty suitable for grade three readers. These texts were therefore difficult for grade two readers. Analysis of the level of difficulty of the VEA texts using the Fry Graph showed that the texts had a readability level within the grade two level, but biased more towards the grade one level. The VEA texts were therefore easy for grade two children. The level of difficulty of the two reading schemes was also assessed using Cloze Procedure.

Table 2: Performance of Grade Two Children in Cloze Tests: Main Study Results.

Reading Scheme	Passage	Class	Average Score (%)
NZPE	14	1	28.6
NZPE	15	2	34.3
NZPE	16	3	44.6
NZPE	17	4	28.7
NZPE	18	5	36.7
NZPE	19	6	20.0
VEA	20	7	30.6
VEA	21	8	31.4
VEA	22	1	23.1

Out of the nine passages randomly extracted from the NZPE and the VEA reading schemes for Cloze Tests, children's performance fell within the instructional reading level in only one passage where the average score was 44.6%. For this particular passage, the reading materials were pegged at the appropriate readability - neither too difficult nor too easy for the readers. At this level of difficulty, readers can cope with the materials with minimal assistance from the teacher or a capable adult.

For the remaining eight passages, children's scores fell within the 20% and 36.7% score range.

Scores ranging between 0% and 43% are an indication that the readers are operating at the frustrational reading level. At this level the reading materials are difficult, hence incomprehensible. There is, therefore, a mismatch between the reading abilities of the readers and the challenges posed by the reading materials.

The two instruments used in this study yielded the same results for the NZPE texts and contradicting results for the VEA texts. While on the basis of results from both the Fry Graph and Cloze Procedure, the NZPE texts were rated as difficult for grade two second language English speaking children, this was not the case with the VEA texts. The VEA texts were rated as easy reading materials for grade two children on the basis of results from the Fry Graph - a text based readability measure. On the other hand, results from Cloze Procedure - a reader based readability measure, rated these texts as difficult for grade two second language English speaking children. Given that Cloze Procedure relies on reader as well as text factors as determinants of text difficulty, children's poor performance on the "supposedly" easy texts, according to text difficulty analysis using the Fry Graph, the VEA texts were rated as difficult for grade two second language English speaking children. This study therefore concluded that the NZPE and the VEA texts were difficult for grade two children whose first language is not English.

Discussion

Before establishing whether or not reading materials are of the appropriate level of difficulty for the intended readership, the reader is reminded that text levels of difficulty have to be understood within a context. The reader, the reading materials, the methodologies used by teachers in the preparation and teaching of beginning reading, and the reading environment, are some of the contexts that influence levels of difficulty of reading materials for a reader or a particular group of readers.

The reader plays an important role in determining whether or not reading materials are rated as difficult or not.

The importance of the reader in text difficulty assessment stems from the fact that factors such as oral language competence, preparedness for reading, reading motive, attitudes towards reading, reading purpose and reading ability, to cite but a few such factors, influence text difficulty levels one way or the other. These reader factors interact with text factors in determining whether or not reading materials are difficult, easy, or just right, for a reader or a group of readers.

Where a reader has not acquired adequate vocabulary to communicate in a given language, expecting such a reader to comprehend reading materials, may be demanding the impossible. This is due to the relationship between one's oral language on the one hand, and one's ability to comprehend reading materials on the other hand. Where readers are "hurried" on to reading materials before they have acquired sufficient spoken vocabulary, there is a likelihood that they will find reading materials generally expected to be manageable for readers of their age group, difficult (Sprosty, 1995; Alexander, 1988).

Methodologies used by classroom practitioners in both the preparation for as well as in the teaching of reading is yet another context within which assessment of text levels of difficulty should be considered. There are a variety of reading methods at the practitioner's disposal. Selecting the methods that work effectively for a particular reader or group of readers is not an easy task (Yon, 1990, Alexander, 1988). Furthermore, selecting which materials to use with readers at different stages of reading development, places a lot of demands on the reading practitioner.

Where an eclectic approach is used, the reading teacher also encounters a number of problems. Selecting appropriate reading materials, for appropriate readers, at the appropriate time, can be problematic. This is due to the fact that there is variability in terms of reading developmental stages among readers in any given class. Furthermore, determining what dosage of which methods to use, at what point of reading instruction, can be a daunting task for many beginning reading practitioners.

Since there is no best method for teaching reading that can be applied to all readers, at all reading stages, using different reading materials, and in all contexts, determining which methods to use and when to use them to maximise comprehension, often becomes the decisive factor to whether readers find reading materials difficult, easy, or pegged at the correct levels of difficulty. Reading methods used by practitioners thus impact on levels of difficulty of reading materials one way or the other.

The third context that one has to consider in assessment of levels of difficulty are the reading materials. The role of vocabulary as a determinant of text difficulty cannot be overemphasised. Children may have limited English vocabulary for a number of reasons. This may be attributed to limited exposure to users of the language, inadequate opportunities to practise the language in real life situations both at home and in formal educational institutions, and poor language models, to cite but a few such examples. Where unfamiliar words are used, readers have problems in understanding the materials.

The structure and length of sentences used in a text is yet another variable that influences text levels of difficulty. The extent to which sentence structures used in the text match the oral language patterns of the reader also influences text levels of difficulty. The sentence structures found in the two reading schemes, while generally "simple" for children of similar age groups as those used in this study, may be otherwise for children involved in this study for a number of reasons. First, English is not the language that these children use in everyday communication. Second, English is not the medium of instruction for the first three grades of primary education in Zimbabwe. Given this little exposure to and opportunities to use English for communication purposes, second language English speakers involved in this study faced far greater challenges in comprehending the reading materials than did their counterparts from the low density government primary schools used in the pilot study. Where sentence structures used in the text differ from those used in children's speech, or, where long sentences are used, readers are likely to encounter problems in comprehending the text. One has therefore to take into account, both reader and text factors when determining levels of difficulty of reading materials.

Text levels of difficulty should be viewed as a product of the interaction of text as well as reader factors. It is within this context of interacting variables that the level of difficulty of the NZPE and the VEA texts should be understood.

The desk analysis of the two reading schemes conducted by the researcher did not reveal anything significantly incomprehensible concerning the vocabulary, sentence structures, or scenes depicted in the two reading schemes. The vocabulary used in the two reading schemes appeared relevant to that used by children within the six to eight years age range. Sentences used in the two reading schemes were considerably short and simple. Furthermore, the illustrations used in the two reading schemes, though not colourful, and as such, not appealing to children, were in most cases appropriate to the content.

Results from the two instruments used in this study were consistent for the NZPE texts but not so for the VEA texts. Results from Cloze Procedure, and those from the Fry Graph, showed that the NZPE texts were difficult for grade two second language English speaking children. Results of text difficulty assessment using the Fry Graph showed that the NZPE were pegged at third grade level, and as such, above the reading abilities of grade two children. These results were matched by and as such confirmed by children's poor performance in Cloze Tests, in which children performed at the frustrational level in five out of the six passages extracted from the NZPE texts.

For the VEA texts, the two instruments used in this study yielded conflicting results. On the basis of text difficulty assessment using the Fry Graph, the VEA texts' level of difficulty was rated as slightly below grade two level. With this level of difficulty biased more towards grade one level, one would expect grade two readers to find the reading materials fairly easy.

However, children performed badly in Cloze Tests extracted from the VEA texts. Their scores fell within the frustrational level in all the three passages extracted from the VEA texts - an indication that the texts were incomprehensible and as such, difficult for the readers. This inconsistency in results could be attributed to probably the inadequacy of the Fry Graph as a level of difficulty assessment

instrument for second language reading materials. It could also be a result of the rather limited variables (vocabulary and sentence length) that the Fry Graph relies on at the exclusion of other important variables.

Very short sentences are used in the VEA texts, and the vocabulary used generally contains few syllables per word. It is no surprise that basing text difficulty assessment on the two variables (vocabulary and sentence length) might fail to incorporate other variables that influence text difficulty, particularly for second language users of English. As such, further research may be needed to establish, first, whether or not the Fry Graph is a valid and reliable measure of levels of difficulty for second language reading materials, and second, investigating the level of difficulty of the NZPE and VEA reading materials for second language English speakers from other Zimbabwean contexts than those from which the participants of this study came from.

Overall, children's performance in Cloze Tests was disappointing. They performed at the frustrational level in eight out of nine passages. Only one class performed at the instructional level. This passage was extracted from the NZPE texts, which was the more difficult of the two reading schemes. This isolated performance could be attributed to chance factors as opposed to an indication of children's comprehension of the passage. One cannot, therefore, generalise children's performance in this single test to other passages in which children's performance was within the frustrational level - an indication that the materials were incomprehensible, and as such, difficult for the readers. This poor performance of children in Cloze Tests may be attributed to reader related factors as opposed to the incomprehensibility of the materials per se.

While the majority of children used in this study were rated as "good" readers by their teachers, they could hardly communicate in English - a language that their teachers expected them to understand in reading. It is interesting to note that there was a vast difference in Cloze Test results of grade two children from low density suburban government primary schools, who were used in the pilot study and those used in the main study.

Although the children used in the pilot study were second language users of English, but from Harare's low density suburban government primary schools, they outperformed their counterparts in the main study. Out of the four comprehension passages assigned to the children used in the Pilot Study, these children performed at the independent level in two passages, at the instructional level in one passage, and at the frustrational level in one passage. It was also of interest to note that even in this passage where children's performance showed that the reading materials were rather difficult, their average scores fell within the frustrational level by a very small fraction of a percentage point outside the instructional level.

Basing on the significantly different results of the grade two children from the low density suburban government primary schools used in the Pilot Study, and their counterparts from the high density suburban government primary schools, used in the main study, these results may be an indication that the two reading schemes were pegged at the correct level of difficulty for grade two readers, but reader related factors impinged on these otherwise readable materials negatively.

The interrelatedness and interdependency of oral language and reading performance cannot be overemphasised. Where readers can hardly communicate in the language that they find in texts, expecting such readers to "unlock" the symbols found in texts, let alone comprehend them, may be asking for the impossible. If children's oral language is "shaky", this tends to have serious repercussions on their reading. Even materials that other children of similar age ranges can cope with, tend to be difficult for them, regardless of whether they are pegged at the correct level of difficulty for the particular grade level or not (Sprosty 1995, Alexander, 1988)).

Conclusion

Results of the present study showed that the NZPE and the VEA reading schemes which are used by grade two children whose first language is not English, were difficult for the intended readers.

It should however be made clear that certain limitations were apparent. The results were based on a small sample of grade two children in Harare. While Harare is the largest urban city in Zimbabwe, findings from this study may not be generalised to children in other urban centres or children in rural areas in Zimbabwe.

References

- Alexander, J.E. (Ed.), 1988, Teaching Reading, 3rd. Ed., London, Foresman and Scott Company.
- Banks, J.A., and Gleggy Jr. A.A., (1990), Teaching Strategies For The Social Studies Inquiry, Valuing And Decision Making, 4th. Ed., New York, Longman.
- Barnes, B., (1986), Ventures English Alive, Grade Two Read and Do Book 1, Harare, College Press.
- Barnes, B., (1986), Ventures English Alive, Grade Two Read and Do Book 2, Harare, College Press.
- Burmeister, L.E., (1983), Foundations and Strategies For Teaching Young Children To Read, Reading, Addison - Wesley Publishing Company.
- Harrison, C., (1980), Readability In The Classroom, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Hergenhahn, B.R., (1994), An Introduction to Theories of Learning, 4th., Ed., New Jersey, Prentice Hall International.
- Longman, (1986), New Zimbabwe Primary English, Revised Edition, Grade Two: Book 1, Harare. Longman Zimbabwe.
- Longman, (1986), New Zimbabwe Primary English, Revised Edition, Grade Two: Book 2. Harare, Longman Zimbabwe.

Longman, (1986), New Zimbabwe Primary English, Revised Edition, Grade Two: Book 3, Harare, Longman Zimbabwe.

Marzano, R.J., Hargety, P.J., Valencia, S.W., An Dis P.P., (1987), Reading Diagnosis And Instruction:Theory Into Practice, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc.

Meek, M., Warlow, A., And Barton, G., (1977), The Cool Web, The Pattern of Children's Reading, London, The Bodley Head.

Meyer, W. F., Moore, C, And Viljoien, G.G., (1990), Personality Theories From Freud To Frankl, Johannesburg, Lexican Publishers.

Ndamba, G.T., (1999), An Investigation Into The Discrepancy Between Official Language Policy And Implementation At Infant Level, Masters Thesis, Department of Teacher Education, University of Zimbabwe.

Sprosty, L., (1995), Teaching The Language Arts In The Primary School, Gweru, Mambo Press.

Yon, J., (1990), Teaching Beginning Reading, Harare, Longman.

Zimbabwe Book Publishers Association And Curriculum Development Unit, Ministry Of Education And Culture, (1992), Making Books, A Handbook For Textbook Evaluators, Harare, Zimbabwe Book Association.



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>