



# Developing Pleasure Reading among Secondary Students: Critical Analysis of Approaches and Challenges

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## Abstract

Pleasure reading is defined as the reading that is freely chosen by readers and that they enjoy the reading (Rumbold, 2006). According to Rumbold pleasure reading has many benefits one of which is language acquisition. The world over, teachers of languages, whether first or second, are faced with the task of ensuring that students have good mastery of the language they are learning. Research in language learning has shown that pleasure reading contributes immensely in mastering a language (Garside, 1991; Barasa, 2005; Rumbold, 2006). Therefore, language teachers should use pleasure reading as one of the approaches that should be used in the teaching and learning process. It is, therefore, important that critical analysis of development of pleasure reading is done. This article gives suggestions on development of pleasure reading.



## **Introduction**

Studies in leaning languages have shown that pleasure reading contribute immensely in mastering the language being learned (Gartside, 1991; Nuttal, 2007; Barasa 2005; Rumbold 2006). However, most language teachers are faced with the question, “ How can pleasure reading among students be developed?” This article suggests various ways through which pleasure reading can be developed among secondary school students.

There are many benefits of pleasure reading as the National Library Trust-UK (2012) opines that pleasure reading has a positive impact on the following: (i) Reading attainment and writing ability, (ii) Text comprehension and grammar, (iii) Breadth of vocabulary, (iv) Positive reading attitudes and (v) General knowledge.

Thus, according to the Nation Library Trust – UK (2012), the ability to read competently and more importantly, the enjoyment of reading has implications for student’s academic success. It adds that reading for pleasure is an important indicator of success in other areas of life. This research found out that students who love reading achieved the following:(i) Had higher scores on the cognitive and social competence, (ii) Had consistently higher scores in mathematics, reading, logical problem solving and attitude, (iii) Had higher average scores for engagement in school, positive communication and relations with family, and positive friendship, and (iv) Had higher levels of motivation towards school.

In contrast, those students who did not enjoy reading were more likely to: (i) be heavier television watchers, (ii) be less likely to complete their homework, (iii) be less likely to enthusiastic about going to school, (iv) have poor reading skills, (v) have poor writing skills and (vi) have poor grammar. Therefore, in conclusion, National Library research Trust-UK observes that:

When children read for pleasure, when they get “hooked on books,” they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the language Skills many people are so concerned about: they will become adequate readers, acquire a wide vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style and become good spellers.

(National Library research Trust-UK 2012, p.18)

## **Review of selected pleasure reading studies**

Another researcher, Pineau (2023) carried out a study titled. “What are the benefits of reading for pleasure?” The aim of her study was to find out academic benefits that result from pleasure reading. The study used correctional design between pleasure reading and acquisition of vocabulary by students studying English as a second language. The findings were that student who engaged in pleasure reading improved on vocabulary.

Jennifer and Ponniah (2015) carried out a study focused on students’ autonomy on the choice of pleasure reading materials. The research design was survey on selection of pleasure reading materials. The findings were that if a student does not feel that they have autonomy over their reading choices then it will not be pleasurable to them and therefore will not read for pleasure. The study also found out that the more someone reads, the more they like to read, and the more that person will benefit from it.



Wilhem and Smith (2016) conducted a study on the types of pleasure teenagers get when they read books that are typically frowned upon by parents and teachers such as romances, vampire stories, horror stories, dystopia fiction and fantasy. They interviewed 8<sup>th</sup> grade students about why they read, what they feel when they read and how it connects to their lives. Wilhem and Smith concluded that there are three kinds of pleasure a reader gets from pleasure reading namely intellect, social and play.

Jennifer and Ponniah (2016) developed a theory called readicide. They explained that readicide is a systematic killing of the love for reading. This means that through various methods, people usually language teachers, unknowingly kill the love of reading for their students. They explain that this may occur by requiring students to read academic texts (set books). These, they add, make students feel too much anxiety since they may not understand the texts on their own because such texts are usually at a higher reading level. In conclusion they say, “If you read a text that is interesting to you, there is a higher chance you will continue to read for pleasure.

From the findings of the studies reviewed, it is clear that pleasure reading has several academic benefits as was summarized by Gartside, 1991; Barasa, 2005; Rumbold, 2006. In view of these findings, it is important for language teachers to set up effective pleasure reading programmes.

### **Setting up Pleasure Reading Programmes**

The link between readings for pleasure and educational success is well established (National Library Trust UK, 2012; Rumbold, 2006; Nuttal, 2007). However, the question is, “How can teachers of English as a second language develop pleasure reading?” In response to this question, Nuttal (2007) argues that setting up pleasure reading programmes will motivate most students to read for pleasure. However, she suggests that before teachers can start pleasure reading programmes, they should address the following questions:(i) What sort of story books do you think will be attractive and interesting to your students and will encourage them to read? And (ii) what books are appropriate for your students in terms of content and levels of difficulty?

These two questions are critical because there are three main factors which affect the successful use of readers which teachers need to consider when making selection of readers. The first factor is students’ motivation and interest. Most language educators agree that it is a hopeless and frustrating exercise to force students to read a book they simply are not interested in (Jennifer & Ponniah 2016). Secondly, there is the question of student’s background knowledge and the relationship between the conceptual difficulty of a book and their ease of comprehension. Background knowledge is a general term which may cover cultural knowledge of the subject matter of a particular book. Finally, the technical details in the presentation of a book, for example, the lay-out of the book, the attractiveness of the cover and the print size have an effect on the student’s motivation and ease of reading.

Made (2002) points out that the success of reading promotion campaign depends to a large extent upon sound understanding of the needs and reading habits of the users. Thus, Made suggests four criteria on which selection of readers should be based namely: (i) The structure



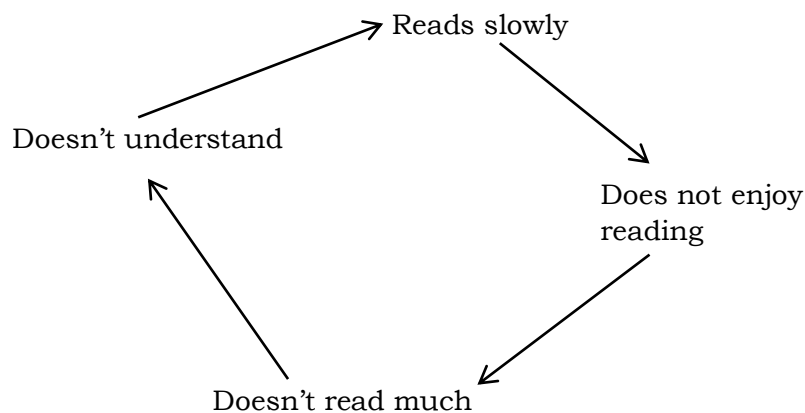
of the reading material, (ii) The suitability of the vocabulary (iii) How interesting the material is and (iv) Cultural suitability.

Nuttal 2007 agrees with Made (2002) that the technical presentation of a book plays an important role in motivating readers. Further, Made argues that the vocabulary writers' use should be suitable to the level of readers. This includes lexical terms, phrasal verbs, idioms and proverbs. The third factor concerns how interesting the reading material is. Made argues that writers can make their material interesting to the readers by use of humor and suspense as a way of making readers be glued on the reading materials. He further notes that reading materials should be culturally suitable. He explains that materials that are culturally removed in terms of customs, values and social norms may be challenging to the readers.

The various studies reviewed on developing pleasure reading (Pineau, 2023; Jennifer & Ponniah, 2015; Wilhem & Smith, 2016) link this to effective mastery of languages. It is, therefore, expected that development of pleasure reading should be encouraged as one of the approaches of teaching and learning languages. Nuttal (2007) suggests how teachers can set up pleasure reading programmes. For reading to be effective, Nuttal suggests that teachers should endeavor to minimize frustrations facing readers.

According to Nuttal (2007) there are four types of frustrations that students may face namely: (1) reading slowly, (2) doesn't read much, (3) does not enjoy reading and (4) does not understand texts. Nuttal presents these forms of frustrations in a cycle as shown in figure 1

**Frustration Facing Reader**



*Figure 1: Frustration Facing Readers (Nuttal, 2007, p.67)*

Students who read slowly hardly enjoy reading so they rarely pick materials and read. This leads to the second frustration of not enjoying reading. If one is not enjoying reading he/she will not read much, and this will affect the level of understanding of reading materials. Therefore, Nuttal (2007) poses the question, "How can students break away from this cycle and enter another called the cycle of enjoyable pleasure reading?" In response to this, Nuttal proposes five factors that lead to enjoyable pleasure reading namely: (i) Improve reading



speed, (ii). Encourage students to read, (iii). Provide suitable materials and (iv) Grade the reading materials.

It is important that students should be taught to read with moderate speed so that they are not too slow hence lose interest or too fast to overlook many language aspects; with moderate speed, there will be both comprehension and attention to various language skills.

Secondly, it is very likely that if students are not encouraged to read then they will not develop the habit. Thus, there should be out-of-school or class assignments and students should be encouraged to see these assignments as useful activities and teachers should check to ensure that they have been done. Nuttal (2007) explains that such checks need not be of voluminous written variety; they should be simple book reports or completion record as given in Table 1.

*Table 1: Pleasure Reading Evaluation Card*

Author: _____	Title: _____	Year: _____
Reader _____	Date Completed _____	
1. Was X responsible for (a key event)?		
2. Did X deserve what happened to him?		
3. Why was the marriage of x and y so important?		
4. Would you have wanted x as your brother?		
<b>Reader's opinion</b>		
1. Did you find this book easy to read? (yes/no)		
2. Did you find this reading material interesting? (yes/no)		
3. Teacher's comments		

*Source: Nuttal 2007, p. 73.*

The third factor concerns providing suitable materials. This factor is important since it deals with personal tastes. If materials are enjoyed by readers, then they will be motivated to read. Thus, it is important to give a variety of materials such as books, newspapers, magazines, periodicals thus Nuttal (2007) argues.

Teachers have no excuses for complaining about lack of reading materials until they have made every effort to utilize the wealth of the free or cheap authentic materials available locally in their schools (Nuttal, 2007, p. 69).

The fourth factor concerns grading materials. That is reading materials should be of varying degree of difficulty. This is because a class is likely to have a wide range of reading levels. It will be necessary, therefore, to have some levels of grading materials to establish the different levels of difficulty. Nuttal (2007) suggests that one way, among others, in which materials can be graded is by use of a test. This may be organized using a cross-section of the materials proposed for the reading programme. The results should give some idea of the levels of difficulty of each material. Such a test may be administered in form of a cloze test. Thus,



from the results, there should be an estimate of the level at which the materials might be used.

## **Conclusion**

Pleasure reading is an integral part of language learning. There are various suggestions on how to develop pleasure reading thus language teachers should make informed choices on what is applicable to their situations. The views by researchers on the benefits of pleasure reading can be aptly summarized as follows. Reading is a more important source of most students' command of language. It is probably true of students that standards of expression, spelling and grammar, about which employers complain of, have suffered from modern shift from reading as a leisure-time activity to attractions of other kinds.

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