Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Dr. Steven R. Yussen, in his book, *Reading Across the Lifespan* (1993:83) states that, "One of the liveliest research in the social sciences is reading". Scholarly activity is currently proceeding along a number of different disciplinary lines, addressing a multitude of questions and issues about reading.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to survey some of the researches, which have been done in the field of reading among teenagers.
2.1 Reading ability and the reading process

Perfetti (1985) mentioned that reading is both simple and complex. It is at the same time both cognitively trivial and so difficult that failure at learning to read is common.

According to Perfetti (1985), Edmund Burke Huey, who published the first comprehensive account of reading, describes reading ability as "the very many of the most intricate of the human mind". Huey in his research on reading clearly states that "it will not be possible to understand variations in reading talent without taking note of some of these intricacies". In other words, understanding reading ability requires understanding of reading. This means knowing something about the components of reading. Hence, individual differences in reading ability can be understood only in reference to these components which include the cognitive and the psycholinguistic processes.

According to Perfetti, based on a study by Jackson and McClelland, individual differences in reading ability were found to be enormous. One defining trait in a skilled reader is a reading rate, that is the speed he reads and his comprehension. They found that effective reading ability is the product of the combination of speed and comprehension.
Perfetti (1985) states that there are many ways in which people can be said to have differences in reading abilities. Reading abilities of the individual differ in the speed of their text reading, their comprehension, their ability to read aloud and even their ability to read unfamiliar words. Perfetti (1985) defines reading ability as comprehension. Comprehension may differ according to low ability or low skill.

Another factor that results in individual differences of comprehension is the ability to encode word meanings. High ability readers know more word meanings than low ability readers. They are familiar with more words and have a precise understanding of words. These factors enable them to read text with less risk of comprehension failure (Perfetti, 1985).

Individual readers may also differ in the lexical process level, which enables decoding to take place. Thus, decoding is a process that sharply differentiates individuals in their reading ability (Spache, 1974:14)

Dr. George D Spache in his book, Good Reading for Poor Readers (1974:14), states that children’s preferences for books and other reading materials are influenced by a host of significant factors. Among the primary factors are the environment and psychological elements of the child’s age, sex, cultural background and motives for reading. Secondary
factors include accessibility of books, teachers’ attitude and classroom reading practices, which can stimulate reading.

The study further states that the most important single influence upon children’s attitude towards reading is interest. Interest is the motivating force that leads to action. When interest is high, books, which are above pupils grade level, were found to be appropriate, but when interest is low, books, which are even below pupils reading level, were found to be too difficult.

Motives for reading were also found to inspire children’s ability to read. Among these motives includes mechanical motives which is compulsive or ritualistic reading; for example reading the morning newspaper which is a ritualistic motive, personal motives where reading is for relaxation and social motives where reading is a form of reinforcement of the individual’s social attitudes and values, as well as for social prestige.

It was found that psychological factors such as age, sex and intelligence affect students’ reading ability and their reading process (Spache, 1974: 18).

Dr. Spache discovered that children’s reading interest showed definite trends related to age. These trends indicate development away from stories about children and animals at
primary grades, towards adventure stories in upper elementary grades and towards stories of their own age group at junior high school.

His studies also revealed a clear-cut difference in the interest between girls and boys. Boys were more interested in stories about accidents, mishaps and adventure. Girls, on the other hand, favoured stories of illnesses, birthdays and parties.

The study also indicated that intelligence affects reading preferences. Dull children chose titles of less variation while brighter children select a wider range of titles.

According to Spache (1974), based on a study by Whitworth, found several environmental factors that affect a child’s reading ability and reading process. These factors include family background, mass media and accessibility.

2.2 Reading for Pleasure

Many reading programmes are found to be very structured. The teachers are equipped with teacher’s manual, workbook activities and skills assessment sheets and students read involuntarily in order to complete given activities. Some teachers feel that students need to do all the activities in the teachers’ manual. As a result, the students may rarely have a
chance to read. That is, they read what is assigned to them and not sit back, relax and enjoy.

According to Spiegel (1981), reading for pleasure or recreational reading is voluntary reading done for enjoyment and relaxation. Recreational reading plays a pivotal role in successful reading. It promotes positive attitudes towards reading, expands experiential background, enhances fluency, provides opportunity for practice in the use of contextual clues and expands vocabulary.

According to Spiegel (1981), a study by Towner and Evans identified Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as the most salient factor in proving that recreational reading programmes really do help children read more and better. SSR improves attitude, increases attention span and leads to better reading ability. A research by the Philadelphia School System (1979) showed that spending more time with independent reading led to significantly higher reading achievement scores for fourth graders.

In Reading for Pleasure, edited by Spiegel (1981), Connor found a strong relationship between voluntary reading and reading achievement of twelve-year-olds. The experimental group was significantly superior in vocabulary and written language fluency.
According to Spiegel, a study by Langford found fifth and sixth graders who engaged in recreational reading had more positive attitudes towards reading and performed significantly higher on the Oral Reading Test as compared to others.

Spiegel (1981) further obtained information from a study by Moore, Jones and Miller, who completed a comprehensive research in recreational reading and found two conclusions. One is that recreational reading has a positive effect on students’ attitude towards reading and secondly, it has a positive effect on reading ability when combined with a regular reading programme.

2.3 Reading habits and Interest of Teens in an English Medium Schools

A study was conducted by Lim T E (1982) on the reading habits and interest of form six students in English medium schools. The findings revealed that students read regularly outside school hours. However, their reading tended to be mainly confined to textbooks. They showed a preference of reading non-fiction to fiction. The reasons given for reading is mainly for acquiring knowledge or for study purposes. Recreational reading is confined to very small group of students. Findings on the type of reading materials show distinct differences between the sexes and also between the arts and science students.
One of the major problems identified in Lim's study is the over attentiveness and excessive concern of students with textbook reading. While textbooks are the convenient forms of reading material, which helps in the student's preparation for their examinations, they need to be reminded that textbooks are not the only important source of knowledge, which should help them in their studies.

Data from Lim's study revealed students' attitude towards reading is merely a means of learning or acquiring information. There is hardly any reading done for recreational purposes.

It was also found that teachers who suggested topics rather than specific book titles gave rise to more reading. This was due to the fact that in tracing a number of resource materials, students would become acquainted with reference materials, book lists and encyclopedias. This could lead to a wider and more extensive reading by the students. Although the techniques of reading can be taught, the ability to derive experience out of reading can be acquired through experience and proper reading guidance.
2.4 Reading and Successful Living

Dr. Leo Fay (1983: 88-95) conducted a study over a span of four years gathering data from teachers, reading specialists and school administrators on the relationship of reading and successful living.

The study aimed to seek what teachers thought of reading enhancers and factors that detract success in reading. Four major conclusions merged from this study.

Firstly, it was found that reading achievement is substantial and appears to be improving universally at the younger age levels and increasing at higher ages. Secondly, many teachers expressed concern that an overemphasis on the basic skills of reading would decrease the opportunity to develop higher levels of literacy and would thus curb higher levels of achievement. Thirdly, it was discovered that students who are not successful, almost invariably have a history of never having been successful in their school reading experience. However, only a small portion of students represents the so-called reading problem group. Finally, reading has had a marked success in developing a trained corps of leadership people in school. The importance of reading in developing strong leadership was apparent.
In the study, respondents were asked to list factors they considered important for enhancing reading in school. There were several factors that were considered major enhancers of reading.

Over 80% of respondents listed a positive attitude of the teaching staff towards reading and students' ability to learn as a major enhancer. School administrators, particularly the principle, should set high expectations for success. There should also be leadership, which is provided by a reading specialist. This would enable teachers to carry out reading programme development and in-service efforts at school level. Other enhancers of reading include good teacher-student relations and positive reactions of parents, students and community towards school and support for reading programmes.

Conversely, there appear to be three major detractors of reading among students. These factors include excessive television viewing that interfered with schoolwork and kept students from reading. Respondents also mentioned the lack of support for materials especially books and for supportive programmes such as reading specialist and school psychologist. Finally, there is also lack of support from home, particularly, parents serving as positive models of reading.
According to Dr. Leo, the school cannot be totally effective working on its own. The home is an important source of support and a worthy complement to the school’s reading programmes. The school and the home can be mutually supportive by setting high expectations for students and teachers.

2.5 Reading Across the Life Span

Dr Steven R Yussen (1983: 89) states that, reading is clearly an activity that spans each of our lives. Reading is a continuum from childhood to adulthood.

Yussen further obtained information from a study by Allen and Rubbin, who conducted a research on how culture shapes all acts of literacy including reading. Culture creates the context for reading and other literate activities. Culture differs according to place and purpose of reading i.e. at home for recreation, at school for memorizing or at work to locate information.

According to Yussen (1983), a study by Hiebert, looks into the context of the beginning stages of reading in early childhood. It was found that children carry large amounts of knowledge, insights and intuition about the world of language, which would give, rise to reading capabilities.
Storybook reading, language play and exposure to print give way to phonics and other learning activities in school.

According Yussen (1983), based on the information obtained from Juel’s study, there are four steps in the process of learning the written language. The child must first recognize that print is encoded in speech, then he must acquire knowledge of the alphabet, develop phonemic awareness and finally discover the relationship between the visual and oral equivalent of words. Juel’s research showed that children with little phonemic awareness at entry into first grade, fail to overcome their poor decoding skills and would lag three years behind their peers in decoding.

According to Yussen, based on Dixon and Backman’s study, it was concluded that there is a distinct relationship between age and the different cognitive functions and skills as we grow older. As children grow older they gain considerable knowledge, experience and practice. They begin to read differently and may shift their processing mode to a different form. For example, while reading they begin to connect new ideas to their life experiences.
2.6 Reading in a Multicultural Society

Wallace (1986: 4) presented research studies on children who are learning to read in the second language. Most of the children in this study were acquiring initial literacy through English. The study was concerned with the relationship between language and literacy among children in a multicultural society, particularly by readers of who English is a second language.

It was found that children in a multicultural society were socialized into reading. They were motivated to read not only for personal reasons such as personal enjoyment of stories, but also for social reasons. They aspire to be members of the society they see around them. Thus, reading is seen as a social function.

For young children the most important context for reading is the home and family. According to Wallace (1986) based on a study by Taylor, showed the importance of print to a child. Sharing of everyday reading programmes can be an important experience for a child.

Wallace (1986) , based on Hewison’s study, describes how two randomly chosen top students in a school from a multiracial city did extensive reading at home. This extra reading practice at home led to a significant improvement in the reading attainment of the
children. Progress was especially seen in reading even when parents were not native speakers of English.

When it comes to considering the uses of first and second language literacy, much depends on the context. Thereby, a study was carried out on a small group of bilingual children to see how they feel about the use of more than one literacy and their purposes for learning the language. Wallace (1986) found that there would be many kinds of reading undertaken in order to maintain feelings of identity with one's own community, ethnic group and family. These can be categorized as private roles. Then there are also public roles, as for being a member of a wider society. Bilingual readers were found to read books in their mother tongue in their 'private' or personal roles, and in English, as members of society at large. Hence, a typical bilingual learner with a clear sense of the need to read in English would relate to roles he or she aspires to in his or her immediate community and in society at large.

The above study also found that the need for literacy depended very much on the role of the reader. English is the most likely language used for survival which includes basic day to day words, in learning of skills which uses textbooks and manuals and for citizenship purposes which includes knowing about and acting on rights and duties which can be obtained from local or international newspapers.
However, it was found that children tend to switch to their own mother tongue in maintaining personal relationships such as writing or reading letters from relatives or friends.

Choosing the right book to enhance reading was found to pose even greater problems. Much depends on the quality of content; if a story has a strong narrative interest, for instance, the reader may be persuaded to read a book that offers authentic reading experience, and not merely an opportunity to improve English. In addition, well-known classics, which are abridged, were also found to be popular among second language readers. The study showed that two classics, *Great Expectations* and *Wuthering Heights*, when simplified, eased the path for second language readers. The reduced length, larger print, different format and illustrations enhanced reading. It was also found that these abridged versions motivated students to read the original books at a later stage. Wallace(1986) further found that criteria such as pictures, which reinforce storyline, true stories, stories on sex, race, class, good stories, cultural diversity, clear predictable structure and well selected vocabulary play an important role in choosing books for second language learners, both as a source of pleasure and learning.
Conclusion

Much research has been done in the field of reading. This gives reading an important role in our lives. However, the ability to read, its habits and awareness varies according to numerous factors. These factors include readers’ cognitive level, their purposes of reading, their ability to read and comprehend, the languages they speak and their home location.