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Unraveling the 'Reading-Research' Meaning and Application Puzzle

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Abstract:
Purpose of the paper- There is conceived confusion on the meaning and let alone application of the two concepts-reading and research. Severally, reading has been mistaken for research and research for reading, in meaning and application, to the effect that the understanding, application and achievement of objectives intended in using the two terms have always gone awry. The purpose of this paper is to clear the mystification. The ultimate aim is to help both students and researchers unknot the confusing strand surrounding the two concepts, and be able to understand why, how, and when each is used, in the knowledge production process.
Design/ methodology/approach- The methodology adopted in writing this paper is the literature-based analysis of concepts about reading and research, with focus on meaning and aim, and their use/ application in which two perspectives-the academic and development perspectives are developed.
Findings- The two concepts 'reading' and 'research' differ in their meaning and partly aim. The word 'partly' here reserves space for the fact that one (reading) complements the other (research) in application, and the reverse is never true. Reading constitutes research and is part of the research process. To qualify for this, reading must be with an aim which must not be pleasure-driven, but directed at producing results that close the gap between the known and unknown. The study therefore establishes that 'reading for pleasure' is 'reading' while 'reading for research' is part of the research process, whose aim and focus transcends mere looking at/into written material to include discovering the logical connection and hidden meaning in words, so that   valid inferences /conclusions and recommendations are derived.

Keywords: reading for research; reading for pleasure; contextualization of reading and research; academic and development perspectives

1. Introduction
Today, being the era of development through generation of new ideas and knowledge, 'reading' and 'research' have received the biggest attention, in the academic and development world, as key drivers to new inventions and innovations. There is, however, continued contention on the relationship between two concepts in terms of meaning and let alone application. This indiscriminately applies to both students and other development practitioners. This continued muddle has in most cases affected conceptualization of the two concepts by users and affected their application, to the extent that they are have been forced into a bracket of equivalence. Most students, and research practitioners alike, are inundated by the conviction that any form of reading, whether in the library or outside, in college-building corridors, reading from under tree shades or at home as we relax, or even reading a news article as we travel, implies research. Well, one may say they are right since they (readers) are looking for answers to questions given by their lecturers or they are interested in or have a problem to find a solution to, in which case most of us would say "they have a knowledge gap to fill". However, as Christina and Kate (2006) contend, there is some tentative evidence that reading at home and as we relax- later in this paper referred to as 'reading for pleasure', and reading for scholarly purposes-later in this paper referred to as 'academic reading', are predicted by different variables.

The positioning of thought, belief and the resulting confusion in defining and applying the terms 'reading' and 'research' is driven by a number of factors key to which is lack of prior knowledge and insight into what reading and research mean and where, when and how they are applied. This statement is in agreement with what Thomas and Nelson (1996:4) believe: "When you mention the term *research* to people, and depending on their background, each will conjure up a different picture in his mind. One might think of going to the nearest encyclopedia; another might visualize a laboratory filled with test tubes, vials and Bunsen burners". This raises a number of questions that desire to be answered, the principal objective of this paper. Does reading mean research? Should 'readers' in their own sense call themselves or be called 'researchers'? Do they (readers) become researchers with time? Can we do reading without research? What about research without reading? Do studies conducted in artificial environments –libraries or laboratories – constitute research.

2. Meaning and aim of Reading and Research

To read means to '*look at/into*' written or printed matter with the aim to comprehend the meaning and interpret the characteristics or symbols of which it is composed.[1] It is making meaning and sense from print. In order for this to be successfully done, some key steps are vital. These include i) identifying the words in print (word recognition); ii) constructing understanding from individual words (comprehension); and coordinating/ connecting the individual word meanings to make a broader understanding. This helps one achieve 'fluency' (fluency is attained where words are automatically comprehended and used with accuracy). This means reading involves use of the sense of sight (for those who can see) or other means for example fingertip-sensing (for those with impaired vision).

Reading is done: i) to discover and comprehend meanings of certain concepts/terms; ii) to understand/ interpret the nature or significance of something; iii) to get clear the procedure for operation and application of say a device for example a new equipment, a drug, new television remote, etcetera. iv) It is also done to pass time! By categorizing the above, it brings us to the understanding that reading may be focused or non-focused. For example (i-iii) show *aim-focused reading*, while (iv) shows *non-aim-focused reading*. This means reading falls into two categories- *reading for research* and *reading for pleasure*. Aim-focused reading is 'reading for research', and includes academic reading. On the other hand, and as Christina Clark and Kate Rumbold, (2006) contend, non-aim focused reading is reading for pleasure.[2] This further implies that reading is done for different purposes and in different ways.

Although reading for pleasure is not always common with and is never applied to research, it has much importance, some of which has indirect connection with research itself: i) it is educational, ii) leads to personal development (Russell, 1961:75); and iii) lays a foundation for future literacy attainment, iv) creates an informed and active citizenry.[3] This type of reading guides people into the future. People can read about the past, present and therefore can tell the future, or they get to understand the world surrounding them. A person reading a novel, a playbook or even a new edition of a news paper does so for this purpose. Such reading must be differentiated from school reading whose aim may be to complete coursework or prepare for an exam. In this regard and as earlier noted, all this is referred to as academic reading. It may be done to fill the gap between the known and unknown. This means it is done as reading for research or as research. Reading for research, if academic, aims to solve *conceptual* problems, not *research* problems (Booth, Wayne, C., Colombo, Gregory, G., Williams, Joseph, M., 2008: 53). A conceptual problem is different from a *research problem* which has practical connotation. Conceptual problems as Booth et al. (2008: 53) affirm arise because we do not understand something as well as we would like. Therefore, we solve them not by doing something to change the world but by answering a question (s) that help (s) us understand them better.

To further understand the difference between 'reading for pleasure' and 'reading for research', it is vital to bring out the features related to 'reading for pleasure': i) It involves materials selected at one's choice[4] ii) May not necessarily call for a lot of effort in prior planning; iii) It can take place in any environment without suffering effect of external factors (extraneous variables) for example noise (consider music, though not to all readers). In research (or aim-driven reading), it must be remembered, extraneous variables are taken to be key influencers of final results; iv) It does not necessarily need to be systematic. Some book chapters can be read in reverse! (from 4 to 3 to 2 to 1). This means readers more creative than critical while reading for pleasure v) Can be applied to anything written/ printed, whether factual or fictitious; vi) Is not necessarily re-done the same way; vii) May not call for a lot of concentration. The degree of concentration and attention paid depends on the nature of the material (Russell, 1961:74). For instance if the piece is a difficult one, a lot of effort will be needed in interpreting it. Consider word and numeric puzzles in news papers.

The above features are summarized in Pullman's (2004:6) assertion thus:

…and we are active about the process… We can skim or we can read it slowly; we can read every word, or we can skip long passages; we can read it in the order it presents itself, or we can read it in any order we please; we can look at the last page first, or decide to wait for it; we can put the book down and … we can assent or we can disagree.

On the other hand, *reading for research* has a number of features which differentiate it from *reading for pleasure* and include: i) It focuses on certain area, 'not reading whatever is seen to be interesting'; ii) Its aim is to get more understanding; create more awareness about the range of opinions and ideas on a given area or topic of interest, and therefore guides one into formulating his own opinion; iii) Normally involves writing down what is seen to be of importance to the area/topic; iv) It is more logical; iv) It involves much more concentration than reading for pleasure, since it aims to discover something vital.

Therefore, unlike reading for pleasure, reading for research normally must involve focus on certain critical parts/features of a given piece that are seen to be of importance: Who wrote the piece? When was it written? Which area of knowledge does it explain? Which methodology was used in writing it? Does it make proper use of other materials or is it properly referenced? Or has it been referred to in any way by other scholars?

Other major differences between *reading for pleasure* and *reading for research* are found in the work of Christina and Kate (2006). According to them, there has been interest in finding out why some people choose to read for pleasure while others do not. The choice of reading is termed as *reading motivation*, in this regard defined as "the individual's personal goals, values and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading". Hence, reading motivation according to them may be

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[1] *See* Oxford Dictionary of English. 3rd ed. p.1477

[2] Reading for pleasure is also known as 'reading for enjoyment' (c.f. Christina C. and Kate R. (2006). *Reading for Pleasure: A Research Over view,* p.5

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement in an activity that is based on personal interest in the activity itself. Readers who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to find a variety of topics that interest them and to benefit from an accompanying sense of pleasure. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation involves engagement in an activity in response to external values and demands. From these arguments, it is clear that reading for pleasure is more intrinsically driven, while reading for research is both intrinsically and extrinsically driven.

Therefore, from the above, and as will be seen later in this paper, reading for research has a lot in common with 'research', and results into making inferences or deductions. This is why it is itself termed as research. But what is 'research or what does it mean 'to research?'

According to Webster (1985:1130) *to research* means to search or investigate exhaustively. Burns (1994:2) cited in Kumar (2007:7) defines research as a systematic and exhaustive investigation to find answers to a problem. Combining the two definitions, research can be defined as a systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. These definitions tell us that research is undertaken either to discover the unknown, or to link the known with the unknown, done by making inferences. Research therefore is done to achieve any of these objectives: i) to gain familiarity with phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it. Such studies are not objective guided and are called *Exploratory studies.*[5] They are particularly useful if one wishes to clarify or extend his/ her understanding of a situation. It is conducted mainly in three ways: search for the existing literature (reading), talking to experts, or conducting focus group interviews (Saunders, 2003:97); ii) to portray accurately the nature and/ or characteristics of a particular situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program. This leads to *describing* the issue at hand- *Descriptive research* (op.cit.,:10); (Moser and Kalton, 1993:2); iii) to discover or establish existence of a relationship or association between two or more aspects of a situation- *Correlational research;* and iv) to clarify why and how there is a relationship between two phenomenal aspects. In such studies, focus is on *explaining* reasons for occurrence of something and the frequency with which it occurs or it is associated with something else (and possibly the effect and possible remedies). Such studies are *explanatory* and d*iagnostic.* Consider what doctors do!

Additionally, research has a number of features which include: i) It is s*ystematic and logical.* Research follows a predetermined procedure (s) and processes to the last stage. Research aims at problem solving. It is hence accomplished through identification of such problem and variables in it, setting up a design that will allow testing of the relationship between these variables, collecting data, analyzing it to reach appropriate deductions (Saunders, Saunders N.K. Mark, Lewis Phillip and Thornhill Adrian, 2003: 97; Amin, 2005: 8); ii) *It is controlled.* Research involves a number of factors that may affect final results. Let us consider a study on 'finding the effect of high temperature on performance of pupils'. In this case, factors within pupils themselves (for example amount and type of food eaten on a given day) or from out side (for example noise) may affect the nature of the final result and must be regulated/ monitored iii) *Empirical.* Research data is not collected from vacuum, not based on fallacies, but on existent facts, either through observation, experimentation, interviewing and discussing iv) *Verifiable.* Conclusions made on the basis of given research findings should remain the same if similar studies are undertaken either by the same person or others. v) *Replicable.* The research process is recorded, enabling others to test or modify the findings by replicating previous studies. Looked at closely, these objectives and features communicate something in common with reading for research, all of which hinge on the fact that reading for research and research are conducted towards a pre-defined direction, and with a predetermined aim.

3. Application of reading and research: How, Where and When
To further get a clear-cut understanding of reading and research, we need to know, *how, where* and *when* the two are applied. Reading and Research are driven by aims, either Academic or Development. This therefore brings us to two perspectives: Academic and Development perspectives of Reading and Research.

3.1. The Academic Perspective
In pursuing academics, students read for several reasons: to complete coursework and as a way of preparing for tests or exams or any other awaiting assignments, to discover what they did not know (get more knowledge), and to pass time, as they relax on a weekend, for instance. This once more implies 'reading for pleasure'. In the three first cases, they engage into *Library-based academic reading* of books, news papers, journals, etcetera, in both hard and soft forms. In such a case, they do '*search into'* these materials. They therefore use research of others (Booth, et al. 2008:3). On the other hand, students in their final years both at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels are required to write dissertations/ theses, in which pertinent information gathered from natural or artificial environments- *field research*- must be incorporated with academic knowledge (got through library reading) for the purpose of completing their reports. They therefore 'read for research'. Similarly, researchers engaged in basic research discover and generate knowledge through reading. This reading as Russell (1961:74) contends is silent, not oral reading. Russell further informs us that reading is not a unitary activity, but instead, makes use of different skills, depending on the purpose for which it is done and the nature of the materials being read (ibid.). To make a reflection to our earlier discussion, if the purpose is to pass time and reduce one's boredom, or if something has attracted one's eye, then reading will be done for pleasure; if one is looking for something specific in a piece of writing, to know what is unknown or prove something, then reading will be done as research.

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[5] Exploratory research is particularly useful if one wishes to clarify his/ her understanding of a problem. It is conducted mainly in three ways: search for the existing literature, talking to experts, or conducting focus group interviews (see, Mark Saunders, Lewis Phillip and Adrian Thornhill, 2003, *Research Methods for Business Studies.* 3rd Ed., p.97).

3.2. The Development Perspective

Experts[6] - as we may call them- engage into deep studies whenever there is a problem (s) affecting 'development' of either an individual or a group (community).[7] They engage in studies (research) aiming at finding out why such development is impeded, to provide lasting solutions to such impediments. These studies may be in form of establishing causes to problems or assessing the causal-effect relationship of a problem; assessing performance of development projects (Evaluation research), general assessment of performance of a given product(s) in a given market to facilitate new developments- Research and Development [R&D], and many others. The solutions are reached by first generating knowledge on such problems. This is done by reviewing related literature, from Organization and Government reports, Periodicals (Journals and Magazines), etcetera, to find out what other experts have written on similar problem (s). In addition, they do gather facts from natural or artificial environments which they later join with this basic knowledge to either solve the problem at hand or make recommendations to be used for the purpose.

4. Towards Consensus

Our purposive categorization of reading has led us to two categories: reading for pleasure and reading for research. According to our discussion, it has been made clear that reading for pleasure is never research, and ought not to be taken to imply so. Nevertheless, it can't go without mentioning that 'reading for pleasure' can be undertaken as a way of exploring and learning more about what one did not know before (c.f. Christina, and Rumbold, 2006:12). Our first point of consensus therefore is: although reading for pleasure is not research, it is exploratory in nature and purpose, thus not in any way different from exploratory research.

Additionally, the discussion above has led us to the position that reading is done as part of research. This means reading itself constitutes research and is part of the research process. However, as earlier noted, to qualify for this, reading must be with an aim which must not be pleasure-related, but leading to results that close the gap between the known and unknown, and must lead to valid conclusions/ inferences and recommendations. This means reading without an aim (mostly formulating recommendation to a problem or making an inference) remains *reading* and the doer never becomes a *researcher*, *neither a reader for research,* but a good reader for pleasure. Similarly, worthy of noting is that *research does not mean reading*. In fact, each of them can be done without the other. It has already been mentioned reading can be done without intent to research. In the same sense, 'some' research, though to a limited extent can be done without reading. If for example I want to understand the meanings and application/use of some words in Runyakitara[8], I may do so by consulting a native expert speaker, through an interview, conversation, discussion. This way, to be sincere, I will be researching. However, I will ably and easily apprehend and interpret whatever is received as response if I have done prior reading on the languages. This will further help me to avoid being told lies or given misleading information. How do I prove that what has been given is authentic? By comparison, and doing further reading (post-research), to establish whether there are any further knowledge crevices.

Reading lays a foundation for research, although research is broader than reading. In fact, success in research needs full ability to read and comprehend concepts and their meanings and to interpret large texts. An exhaustive investigation does not only make use of the 'reading skill' and 'reading-related strategies' but an array of other skills and strategies: speaking, listening, interpretational, and planning skills. This means reading is, but just one of the skills required to make research a success. Thomas and Nelson (*op.cit.,*: 8) affirm the significance of reading to research thus: "If you are not knowledgeable about the subject matter, you cannot read the research literature… if you know the subject matter, you can probably wade through the researcher's jargon more effectively." How do we get knowledge on the subject matter? We must do pre-research reading. This helps us to: i) understand the problem to be researched on, ii) find out the relevant literature iii) define the conceptual boundary of the problem at hand iv) identify what is missing that needs to be looked for by researching about it.

Reading is continuous, since research is. According to Murindwa (2003: 2), reading is one of the most important activities in the research process which precedes research, continues throughout the research process and proceeds to outlive any research project. Pre-research reading is done to find out ideas/ facts on the subject to be researched on, while post-research reading is done for verification purposes. Research begins with understanding the problem- done through critical reading (literature review); followed by formulation of an aim/ objective, defining and re- defining the problem, designing an appropriate procedure, collecting, organizing and interpreting data to make deductions/recommendations- applied, tested, evaluated and re-evaluated through reading. Reading helps us to understand what we are to research about or are researching about, and accurately evaluate our research and that done by others. Kumar (2007) contends with the above, thus:

…one of the most essential tasks when you undertake a research study is to go through the existing literature in order to acquaint yourself with the available body of knowledge in your area of research. The literature review is an integral part of the entire research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step. It has value even before the first step; that is, when you are merely thinking about a research question that you may want to find answers to through your research journey. In the initial stages, it (reading) helps you to establish the theoretical roots of your study, clarify your ideas and develop your

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[6] The term must not be limited to 'research' experts. It has been used to connote practitioners in different professional areas - Medicine, Economics and Business, Law, Engineering, etc., who can do research

[7] Such problems may include Disease, Poverty, shortage of Safe and Clean water, Illiteracy, Crime, Business failure, and many others.

[8] Runyakitara is a word referring to four major lacustrine dialects found in western Uganda namely:), Rukiga (used by Bakiga in Greater Kigezi), Runyankole, (used in Ankole by Banyankole, Runyoro and Rutoro (used by Banyoro and Batoro) See <http://llc.mak.ac.ug/african-languages-subjects/runyakitara-basic>

methodology, but later on, it serves to enhance and consolidate your knowledge base and helps you to integrate your findings with the existing body of knowledge (P.30).

We further infer that research, like reading can be ably conducted in different types of environments. We noted two types of environments in which research is done: the *artificial environment* and the *natural environment.* The former denotes library or laboratory research, while the latter is field-based research. Reading can as well be conducted in these types of environments. In fact, reading for research mentioned above goes on even if one is in a laboratory. The only difference is, research environments unlike reading (for pleasure), are pre-determined (the decision of where to conduct research from depends on the nature of the problem, or one's purpose and objectives for researching). Taking as an example, the intention to study behaviour of a people of a certain area as our aim, we must first establish the demarcations, which tell us either whether to sample or take the whole group, and even the method to use to get the behaviour, before the study begins.

5. Conclusion
By way of concluding, it has been seen that the difference between reading and research is comprehended by categorization. Having done so for reading, a common ground has been reached that 'reading for pleasure' is 'reading' while 'reading for research' is part of the whole research process, and is itself research. This has further implied that reading for research and research are inseparable, as the former is used to set direction for the latter, and is used to prove, whether what was got is valid and true, thus the assertion "reading (for research) precedes research itself, continues with it and proceeds after it". To this end therefore, to succeed in research, students and research experts (practitioners) must possess reading skills. Good readers make good researchers! However, we must note the fact that research needs a great deal of more other practical skills beyond reading. Therefore, as Trochim (2006) affirms, it is imperative have the knowledge of research realities than just continuing to hold the assumption that if one reads a lot on an area of interest, they will somehow magically be able to produce sensible ideas for further research.

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