

Towards Testing the Effectiveness of English Language Teacher's Repertoire through Teaching Reading in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract:- This study is meant to test the effectiveness of English language teacher's repertoire through teaching reading in Nigerian secondary schools. Failure to include national reading policy in Secondary school curriculum leads to making this paper. The study highlights the importance of reading. New official policy statement on reading as produced by Research Development Council (NERDC) also comes in the paper. Various reading techniques and sub-techniques are fully discussed with ample illustrations. These techniques include teaching vocabularies, teaching reading for main ideas, teaching reading for critical evaluation, teaching oral reading skills etc. Since the major goal of the study is to test the mastery of language teacher's reading skills, retrain them towards accumulating new trends related to teaching reading, the paper then finally recommends that let the teachers provide right techniques and right instructional materials that can help to correct errors for the benefits of learners. Let the teachers improve reading culture in students because successful training in extensive reading naturally leads to the development of the reading culture which is the bed rock of life-long education. There is also need for federal ministry of education to include national reading policy in secondary school curriculum where reading should be seen and treated as a school subject.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the ability to pronounce or absorb what is on the print. Reading is the third skill in the four language skills; others are listening, speaking and writing. The development of the ability to read in the second language is one of the most important responsibilities of the language teacher. Language teacher is the best resourced to inculcate in the learners reading competence. To support this, Azikiwe (1998:33) posits that "reading competence is important because it underlines success in all areas of learning."

Moreso, one needs to understand that secondary education provides a vital link between the primary and tertiary education. While reading should be introduced in the primary level, the teaching of reading should be consolidated in the secondary school. If reading is necessary for the acquisition and use of knowledge (Okoye and Ene 2011), secondary school students need to be well grounded in reading skills to be able to meet up with the challenges of secondary education, external examinations, higher education and successful living outside school and in the work places.

II. WHAT IS READING?

Reading which is a complex psych-linguistic process involves mastery of the language signals such as letters, words, sentence structure and also such psychological factors as readiness and motivation Ene (2018)

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines reading this way: to read is to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbols.

Reading according to Chukwuma and Otagburuagu (2001) is "simply the recognition or identification of the words represented by the printed symbols: simply the production of spoken words or spoken form; the meaningful interpretation of written or printed verbal symbols; saying the correct words represented by the printed words.

Fall (1973) in Ahmed and Odiwo (1999) defined reading as "interaction or adult knowledge of their language with material printed or written that they may perceive visually."

Reading involves communication. It involves mental contact and how people's minds can meet one another through interacting with written material even though the people may be far apart physically. Reading is known as receptive skill because it unlocks what is encoded in books and other forms of written materials. Reading is important for the acquisition and used of knowledge even from earliest times (Okoye and ENE 2011). It is even more crucial in the present information age

III. IMPORTANCE OF READING

Reading is very importance because:

- *It sharpens your mind:*

By concentrating in the words and the story line, reading stimulates your brain. This particular stimulation can help sharpen your mind, especially the part of the brain that is responsible for concentration and critical analysis

- *It increases your vocabulary:*

When reading, one might come across a few words that one does not quite understand or even recognize. This confusion can lead us to look up the word and discover the definition

- *It lowers your stress:*

The act of reading and focusing on the written word can help relieve our mind off the pressures of the day. By pulling your mind away from the stress at hand, you can relax and let the stress melt away

- *It decreases your depression:*

Reading especially self-help books can help ward off depressive occurrences. Just like with lowering our stress levels reading stimulates the part of the brain that deals with depression as well.

- *It strengthens your writing abilities:*

Whether one writes things for work or just for fun, heavy reading can improve one's writing skills and abilities. There are several ways in which reading can help strengthen one's writing skills and each of these ways happens without one even realizing it.

- *It enhances your imagination:*

Consider the worlds that people are immersed into and the characters they come across while reading a novel. Because of these words and characters, the part of our brain which houses our imagination is stimulated, causing us to imagine what the places and people look like just by picturing the words

- *It boosts our sleep:*

Reading since it helps us relax and destress, can help pull us into a deep and peaceful sleep. That sounds like it might be too good to be true, but reading can indeed help us sleep

- *It enjoys our entertainment and peace:*

Any reader knows that reading can be peaceful and induce a relaxing state of mind. By immersing ourselves in a good book, we can almost feel any stress or worry melt away.

- *Reading can brighten our day:*

Books can bring joy to our lives on a daily basis. The act of reading is a great benefit both to mental and physical health, but it can also brighten our day.

IV. OFFICIAL POLICY STATEMENT ON READING

It is very unfortunate as the scenario of teaching reading in the secondary schools in Nigeria is dismal. Udosen (2004) laments that reading has no place in the secondary school curriculum at the secondary education level and that this has a carryover effects on students' literacy level and teachers' practices in the classroom. In another study, Ogbonna (2009) also confirmed the absence of any reading programme in our secondary schools and laments the absence of a literacy policy in this country which should inter alia, emphasize reading. Prior to this, reading experts have regretted the state of reading in Nigeria and the consequent damage on the products of the school system. However, Research and Development

Council (NERDC) saved the situation by providing what is referred to as *An Authoritative Statement on Reading* in the absence of a national reading policy say that secondary school students should be taught to:

- a. develop the ability to read any written texts or printed materials easily.
- b. read aloud any materials written in English in an intelligent and meaningful way for the listeners to understand and comprehend easily
- c. understand with sufficient comprehension any material they are made to read in English;
- d. through a proper knowledge and understanding of the lexical, grammatical and rhetorical devices used by the author capture from such written or printed material the essential meanings that are intended by the author;
- e. acquire the ability to resolve relative difficulty and complexity that students may encounter in their reading provided that such materials being read are considered appropriate to their levels.
- f. be able to make as much sense as is possible out of any written or printed matter even when some of the writing conventions of English have not been strictly followed in the matter being read;
- g. through a proper knowledge of the writing conventions of English, the grammar, lexis and other devices aimed at enhancing effective communication in the language, develop the ability to read extensively and a continuing interest in reading for pleasure.
- h. cultivate the ability to read and with the speed to cope easily and effectively with the volume of reading that will be required of them if and when they are in the university or any profession in which the need for fast and effective reading is essential

Techniques of Teaching Reading at Secondary School Level

There are many basic reading skills which the teachers are expected to inculcate in the secondary school students. According to Unoh (1985), they include:

1. Vocabulary/word power skills:

How to Teach Vocabulary Development?

Words are the building blocks upon which passages are built. So to understand what any passage is saying, one has to understand what the words are saying. It is necessary to increase word power as this has an effect on the students' level of performance in reading tasks by reducing difficulty for comprehension. A good command of vocabulary or word power is necessary for effective reading. Teaching vocabulary development increases the range of words and helps a learner to meet the challenge of reading materials in different content areas. Brown and Fishco (2001:29) found out that vocabulary in context contributes 39 percent to comprehension and word

discrimination contributes 28 percent to speed of reading more than any other factor.

To teach, this teacher should teach students different word-attach skills to help them build and use a large bank vocabulary. The teachers can use any of the following techniques:

a. Context Clues

Teach students that meaning of some words could be guessed from the context. An important part of reading is being able to guess the meaning of unknown words and there is need to teach students to develop their reading skills by giving them practice in this. Only those words that could make it very difficult to understand the text to be dealt with before hand. Consider the following:

The children were ‘bleebing’ all over the playground. The word ‘Bleebing’ could be a verb showing movement such as playing, running dancing, jumping etc. so students can read and understand a passage without knowing the meaning of every new word.

Teach students that a word can have several meanings depending on the context. The teachers should teach to show how the context narrows whereby the meaning is implied as in the word “fast.” ‘Fast’ may mean ‘speed’ or ‘swift’ ordinarily.

E.g.

The man is moving fast

The new train travel fast

But does it mean the same as in ‘fast colour’ or ‘fast friend’?

E.g.

The colour of the cloth is fast.

His friend plays fast.

b. The used of word parts:

The teacher should teach the learners to recognize the morphology of words and how several words can be decoded through this very easy way.

Teach students word roots or stem and how other words can be formed using affixes. For example, mono means *one*. It can be built up to give words like mono-poly, mono-technic, mono-syllabic, mono-lingual etc.

Prefixes:

Example, “*Pre*” is a prefix meaning before, as in predominate, pre-position pre- suppose, pre-natal e.t.c.

ir is also a prefix as in irresponsible, irregular, irreversible, irrelevant e.t.c.

But words with suffixes are as follows:

Help-less,

Friend-ly

Man-hood

Neat-ness

Help-ful

Better-ment etc

c. The use of dictionaries:

The teacher should teach students how to use the dictionary to learn the different meanings of a word, the spellings, and the part of speech the word belongs to, the phonetic transcription, stress, other variants of the word and many more.

For example:

The preposition *before* can mean (i) earlier than (ii) in the presence of (iii) in front of (IV) rather than.

The students can be given a matching exercise of how each of the four different meaning of “before” can be matched with one of the following sentences:

- i. The child had to appear before the headmaster.
- ii. She was born before the war.
- iii. Honor before wealth.
- iv. The criminal appeared before the judge.
- v. I saw him two days before wedding.

The above sentences are example of usage which has been infact included in the dictionary. Students should be given practice in identifying usage in appropriate contexts as provided in the dictionary.

d. Semantic mapping:

This means that a word can help to generate new words from the key words. This concept is based on the principle that word shares four relationships thus:

- i. The class to which it belong
- ii. The examples for that particular word
- iii. The attributes or properties of the word
- iv. The related concepts or other words belonging to the same family with the word in question. Take a word like *Dog*, in term of class, it is mammal, domestic animal or human pet. Examples include terrier, grey hound, Alsatian (also known as police dog), puppy, bitch, mastiff, mongrel etc.

The attributes of a dog may include: barking, hunting, keeping watch/warding of thieves used by police to track down criminals, good sense of smell etc.

Other related concepts include cats, fox, wolf, jackal etc.

e. Formation of words from one part of speech to another:

- From verbs to nouns, e.g. admit-admission, believe-belief, invite-invitation.
- From adjectives to nouns, e.g. able-ability, brave-bravery, courageous-courageous wise-wisdom.
- From verbs to adjectives, e.g. rest-restless, exclude-exclusive, conclude-conclusion etc.

f. Vocabulary notebook:

The teacher can encourage the learners to build a vocabulary notebook by compiling at least ten new words that they come across every day. It can be ruled to have different headings like word, part of speech, root/origin, transcription, meaning, usage in sentences. In this way they are consciously accumulating words which will aid in reading comprehension. A good student needs up to twenty thousand words in the dormant vitality and up to ten thousand words in the active vocabulary.

g. Practice:

Using those words in oral or written communication. This entails copious practice to convert the learned words to active vocabulary.

h. Reading task:

Read this passage carefully and in groups of four, build a semantic grid of five words from the passage.

The passage

Today agricultural experts tell us that the hoe and cutlass are no longer good enough for modern farming. Rather what we need are tractors, planters and harvesters which are the means for mechanized agriculture. In the same way, farming is not for everybody but rather for trained agriculturalists who understand the science of crops and animals husbandry.

Activity:

Form new words from the following:

Planter, harvester, hoe, Mechanized.

2. Teaching Reading for Finding the Main Idea

Main idea of a paragraph is the author's message about the topic. It is often expressed directly or it can be implied.

.Where the main ideas are found?

Main ideas are often found at the beginning of paragraph. The first sentence often explains the subject being discussed in the passage.

Main ideas are also found in the concluding sentences of a paragraph. The main idea can be expressed as a summation of the information in the paragraph as well as a link to the information in the text. For that, students should be taught how to skim and scan materials. They should be taught flexibility in reading. Different skills are applied to different materials for greater success in reading.

Activities involve in reading for main ideas:

- Ask students to describe the main idea of pictures as opposed to text.
- Have students read a passage and highlight the main idea.

- Play the two words description games, that is, after reading a very brief passage or paragraph, ask students to sum up what they have read (or have heard) in just a few words.
- Use the idea of hamburger model to teach the concept of main idea to early learners.
- Use a tree trunk to symbolize the main idea and the branches to symbolize details.
- Compare titles to main ideas. That is, explain to the students how titles can be changed into main ideas.

3. Detailed Reading:

This technique is used for extracting information accurately from the whole text. Under this technique, students are asked to read every word for understanding the meaning of the text.

In this careful reading students can skim the text first for getting a general idea and then go back to read in detail. A teacher can guide students to use dictionaries to find the meaning of every unfamiliar word.

4. Teaching Reading for Retention and Recall:

It is important to teach learners how to recall what they have read. The teacher can use the guiding questions to test recall of reading materials at reasonable intervals during the reading exercise. This uses the concepts of learning peaks and achievements. The students are taught to read for some minutes and then pause for some times for the recall exercise. This simple practice establishes retention.

5. Teaching Reading for Critical Thinking/Evaluation

Students should be taught to establish cognitive structures so that new ideas can fit in with existing structures. This entails teaching students to sort out ideas under their different classes, depending on their differences and similarities so that a proper organization of the ideas could be achieved. The students should be able to distinguish facts from opinions, logical arguments from bias or generalizations, inferences, emotional appealed from propaganda. It is this skill that gives the students appropriate mental set up for critical reading and assimilation of knowledge (Uwatt Nta 2010). This skill also helps the students to differentiate between literary and implied meaning, as well as between the tone and mood of the author.

6. Teaching Oral Record Skills:

The teacher should use the systematic oral practice lessons whereby students' oral reading errors are diagnosed, brought to their attention and then corrected.

The teacher can serve as a model in oral reading by providing good illustrations of effective oral reading. The teacher can also improvise by using tape recorders, CD plates, recorded stories, video clips and other teaching aids to model good reading standard.

The language laboratory should be used for practice in listening to good oral reading of scripts or BBC Standard English broadcast.

To be included in the training are:

- Eye-voice co-ordination
- Proper phrasing
- Proper articulation/ pronunciation of sounds
- How to correct errors if they exist

7. Teaching Intensive Reading:

This requires the reader to understand the passage being read. It involves specifying the purpose of the passage and selecting the appropriate skill for it. Intensive reading requires detailed exploitation of the text.

Strategies for teaching intensive reading:

- Treating new words:

The first thing in reading is to scan through quickly and pick up the key words from the various parts of the passage possibly starting with the title. The learner may think of the possible message and ponder of possible approach if one is to write on the topic how to start.

- The SQ3R Stands for Survey Question Read, Recall and Review.

Survey:

This means to survey the whole passage by looking at it in its totality to get a general idea about it. Is it a story, a description, an encounter, an economic analysis, a debate etc.? It may be a story on Ebola

Question

This means to roll the matter over in your mind and come up with relevant questions such as:

- Has the Ebola now entered Enugu?*
- How many casualties so far?*
- What possible measures have been put in place?*

8. Teaching Extensive Reading:

This is the beginning of reading for life-long learning otherwise known as reading for pleasure. The teacher should emphasize the skills of rapid reading, faster comprehension and ability to read longer passages. This involves vocabulary development (as seen earlier), ability to use new words, rapid comprehension and structure. Extensive reading involves the reading of supplementary texts. In this type of reading, emphasis is laid on free and wild reading and students are given opportunity to read silently and rapidly.

Steps in teaching extensive reading:

In a case where the students are reading different books, individuals could be asked to discuss or narrate what they have read from their books on specific chapters if the teacher is aware of the books. Ask them to say what is more interesting in the books they have read and characters that they admire more in the books.

- Mentioning:

They can go out to mention which new words are learnt, and if there are difficult words discuss the words with the pupils.

- Let the learner read the passage quick and silently without model reading but if there is a passage you want to emphasize, then a student can read it out.
- Ask them literal questions on the passage. It could be answered orally or written down; such questions could be short and demand short answers. If it was a novel e.g. **Things Fall Apart** by Chinua Achebe, after reading the first three chapters, a teacher can ask his students the following questions:

- a) Why was Okonkwo known throughout the village?
- b) How did ikemefuna come to be placed under Okonkwo's protection?

9. Teaching Skimming:

Skimming is the fastest possible reading rate. It is a form of selective visual reading, a rapid visual exploration of reading materials, with a view to identifying and focusing on what is actually required, important or significant in relation to one's reading objective. In practice, it entails quickly looking through reading materials in search of what one needs or wants, skip reading or skipping materials that are considered unimportant or irrelevant and focusing on scanning or reading materials that are adjudged relevant or materials.

10. Scanning

This may be defined as that stage in the skimming or rapid visual reading process when the reader identifies and focuses some attention on sections or parts of his reading materials which strike him as relevant or pertinent to his needs. Scanning entails relatively careful and attentive reading with a view to grasping relevant parts of what one needs.

The teachers should emphasize the relationship between skimming and scanning. A good reader who is proficient achieves flexibility by his ability to change his gear as and when necessary, so also does a good skimmer. He varies his reading speed from very rapid visual reading and skip read (or non- reading) through relatively less rapid or more careful reading which results in scanning. Inability of learners to skim and scan causes some reading problems.

V. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Desirable reading skills, if available, have gone a long way to help both the teacher and the learner in academic and personal reading/ research. The teacher must realize the fact that he /she is very important factor that affects effective teaching of reading. His skills, personality and commitment are in a great deal instrumental to providing favorable condition for affection teaching of reading at all level of education in general, and secondary school in particular. The teacher should always make sure he prepares very well before going

to teach reading. In addition, the teacher should endeavor to go often on training and the re-training in methods of language teaching in secondary schools. He can do this by attending conferences, workshops, symposia, seminars etc. To achieve effective reading skills at secondary school level, let the teachers use modern techniques of communicative language teaching in teaching reading. There is need for a literacy policy for the education system of this country – primary secondary and teacher education sectors. The policy should make provision for literacy benchmarks that will cover reading. Reading should be seen and treated as a school subject.

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