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CONTENTS

Relative Effects of Hands-On Experiences & Expository Teaching Strategies on Students' Retention of Learning Materials in Science <i>E. O. Odubunmi & B. A. O. Onafowokan</i>	1
Politicization of Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Growth and Development <i>Apegba K.E.R.</i>	11
The Perceptions of Regular English Language Teachers of Inclusive Education <i>Okebukola Foluso</i>	20
Application of Ethical Contents of the Primary School Syllabus to Societal Needs <i>M. O. Raheemson</i>	27
Physical Attributes in Enhancing Excellence in Track & Swimming Events <i>Owolabi E. O. & Akeredolu O. A.</i>	31
A Survey of the Attitude of Nigerians Towards The Aged and Ageing <i>Supo Jegede</i>	38
Language Planning as Language Deprivation: Another Look at Nigeria's Educational Language Policy <i>Rosellne Abonego Adejare</i>	49
Women in Informal Science: The Survey of A Nigerian Locality <i>B. A. O. Onafowokan</i>	62
Problems of Reading Efficiency in Yoruba in Secondary Schools <i>Makinde, Solomon Olanrewaju</i>	76
A Study of The Causes of Staff-Authority Conflict in the Higher Institutions in Ondo State <i>Oyebade, Eunice Funke</i>	84
Issues in Science Education in Nigeria <i>Banjoko S. O.</i>	94
The Capability of Social Studies to Inculcate Moral and Social Values into Learners <i>Jimoh A. S.</i>	97

PROBLEMS OF READING EFFICIENCY IN YORUBA IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines reading problems in Yoruba in secondary schools. These problems are caused by a number of factors which include: Influence of English Language; the tonal nature of Yoruba Language; dialectal influence and inability to understand expressions like idioms, proverbs etc. The problems were looked into after a brief conceptual analysis on the concept- 'Reading' was given with some important factors which determine reading efficiency. Suggestions were made with regard to ways of improving reading abilities of students in Yoruba.

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have tried to define reading but time and space would permit the ideas of just a few of those definitions. Russel (1961) says reading is responding. The response may be somewhat a deeper level of understanding of the explicit meaning of a sentence, paragraph or passage and it may involve going beyond the facts to the discovery of new and personal meanings. He went further to propose five components of reading which are word recognition, comprehension, reaction, rates and utilization.

Gibson et al (1967) describe reading as consisting of decoding graphic material the phonemic patterns of spoken language which have already been mastered before reading is begun. Robinson (1946) too identified five components of reading to include: word recognition; comprehension; reaction, fusion and rates. Unoh (1986) describes reading as a combined activity of the eye which perceives and explores the verbal symbols and the mind, which discovers and interprets the thoughts that lie beneath them.

The Michigan Reading Association (1988) cited in Onukaogu and Arua (1997) defines reading as:

the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among readers' knowledge, information suggested by the written language and the context of reading (p. 4).

The definitions and the components can be said to be stressing three levels of reading which according to Ezeokoli (1987) are the following:

Literal- ability to recognize the printed and surface meaning (i.e. reading on the line).

Inferential- reading to get the hidden meaning (i.e. reading between the lines).

(c) Evaluation- reading critically to assess and judge the material read (i.e. reading beyond the lines).

Reading in the various subjects areas require students to be able to function at the three levels. Harris (1947) writes that reading could be functional or recreational. Functional reading according to him is that undertaken in order to obtain information necessary to tackle a specific problem and this will require the ability to read the texts swiftly with understanding. Surely, this aspect of reading is widely applicable to most forms of learning, especially in Secondary and Higher Institutions of learning. Recreational reading on the other hand is essentially reading for pleasure and enjoyment. The basic components of reading according to Lasisi (1997) include: word recognition, text comprehension and reading speed. Explaining further, word recognition is essential to vocabulary development and for an individual to be nurtured in word recognition skills, the process of language arts teaching (listening, speaking, reading and writing) must be followed. The word recognition skills include phonics, structural analysis and contextual analysis. Comprehension of text involves understanding the three levels of (literal, inferential and evaluation) which are presented in ascending order according to the different rates, which vary according to the goal or purpose of the reading situation.

DETERMINANTS OF READING EFFICIENCY

One of the essential determinants of reading efficiency according to Schonell (1945) is the general maturity of the reader in terms of the mental, physical and emotional. It is the mental maturity of the reader that determines the suitability of the text or reading materials to be presented before him; the ability to make use of the visual power effectively goes for the physical maturity and a child's emotional maturity could be determined through the observation of his homeness in group situations and how he reacts to difficult situations as well as his ability to sacrifice pleasure for future gains.

Unoh (1986) also highlighted what reading efficiency would require. The reader according to him must have good visual perception or visual span. Such reading must be dynamic, active or critical. There must be little or no regression and backward fixation. The reader must read for thoughts, phrases or ideas, and should avoid 'word-by-word' or 'look-and-say' method of reading. Reading technique must show flexibility by being slow, medium slow, fast and very fast as the occasion demands. Motivation on the part of the reader is essential, engaging himself in a lot of extra-curricular reading to increase his vocabulary or word power, familiarizing himself with various terms of expressions in the particular medium of communication and the mastery of the structural essentials of the language.

Unoh also explained that the reader must aim at the appropriate level of comprehension, recall and remembering by organizing his reading thoughtfully and meaningfully. Then the reader must be free from any personality or other defects that are capable of impairing his reading ability.

The views of Schonell and Unoh as explained above could be seen as all-encompassing since all the skills in reading as well as those things that might impede

reading are taken into account. But in order to judge a particular reading exercise as being efficient or not, the purpose of such exercise must be taken into consideration.

PROBLEMS OF READING YORUBA EFFICIENTLY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

As a matter of fact, it is expected of a secondary school student whose mother-tongue is Yoruba to have undergone the rudiments of reading skills in the language at the primary school level which are: ability to recognize stylized shapes, that is the recognition of ink marks on a page; ability to correlate the patterned shape or ink marks on paper with language, that is the correlation between element of the pattern on paper and elements of the language-formal linguistic elements which may be complex groups of sounds knitted into 'words', 'phrases' or even sentences. Since the essence of the reading is the transforming of the visual representation of the language into meaning, the mastery of the above skills is invaluable especially at the primary school level because according to Afolayan (1982), this is the stage at which basic grounding in Yoruba should be established for it is fundamental to the education of any Yoruba child.

However, experience has shown that there abound a lot of problems militating against efficient reading in Yoruba in our secondary schools both at the junior and senior levels. While the situation appears better in some states schools, the unity schools and some private secondary schools are the worst for it. Some of the problems common to such schools are:

Most of the students attended Nursery/Primary Schools where Yoruba is either not taught at all or taught haphazardly as most of their teachers cannot communicate in Yoruba.

The schools admit students from all the states of the federation hence the multilingual nature of the students.

Some of the students had their primary education in foreign countries like Britain, America and so on.

The schools are short-staffed and as a result most of the schools cannot provide for the L₁ and L₂ classes, hence all the students are forced to attend L₁ classes and this is applicable to other two Nigerian Languages (Igbo and Hausa).

There is also the fact that most of the proprietors of private Nursery/Primary Schools do not know the importance of teaching local languages, Yoruba inclusive, in their schools.

Another problem affecting all categories of secondary schools is that of lack of enough suitable texts to cater for the L₁ speakers and if at all these are available, Nigerian language teachers are not just available in number and quality. Other significant problems are those associated with the nature of the language which be examined one by one.

One of such problems is the influence of English language sounds on the Yoruba sounds. Many of those students find it difficult to identify and pronounce correctly Yoruba alphabets. This is common mostly among students whose L₁ is not Yoruba and or those who speak different languages at home. Their

problems could be seen in the way they read or pronounce these sound segments when they occur in Yoruba words. Some of the sound segments, both vowels and consonants, are a, e, i, gb, s, and kp. Examples of words where these sounds occur and how they are wrongly pronounced are:

- (ii) agbe pronounced as egbe
- (iii) ejo pronounced as ijo
- (iv) gbogbo pronounced as popo
- (v) asa pronounced as aza
- (vi) iyawo pronounced as eyawo or eyawo

These are just few out of the many mispronounced sounds. The phonemic substitutions as found above are either due to the influence of English sounds or dialectal influence as in example (iv) which is common to Oyo students.

The strength of the Oyo dialect could be seen in the song of that popular Doctor of Fuji music- Ayinde Barrister when he sang:

Q: •Ki la je lanas? (What did we eat yesterday)

A: Eran sinkin ni (It was chicken)

Q: Ki lai jokoo? (On what did we sit?)

A: Kusin sia ni. (On cushion chair)

The same substitution of /s/ aikunyun Aferigipe Afunnupe Voiceless alveolar fricative for // Aikunyun afajafirigipe afunnupe voiceless palato-alveolar fricative.

Not only that, the tonal nature of the language constitutes no small dilemma to the students as they are in utter confusion as to how to read or pronounce words and sentences like:

1. Ojo (rain) which is sometimes mispronounced as Ojo (coward) or 'Ojo' (a name).
2. Sun (sleep) is either pronounced as sun (English) or sun (shift) or sun (burn).
3. 'Ode' (silly) to some is ode (hunter)
4. Ajani babe Mukaila (Ajani the father of Mukaila) is mistakenly read by some as Aja ni babe Mukaila (The father of Mukaila is a dog).
5. Egbo mi ti jinna (my sore has healed up) is mistakenly read by many as Egbo mi jinna (my egbo, a kind of food made from corn- has cooked).

Apart from that, there is the problem of idiomatic expressions in Yoruba. They easily take the expressions for their literal meanings. It looks magical to them when they are told the meanings. For example faake kori (hang the axe on the head) instead of the figurative or deeper meaning: (to refuse bluntly). To soke (urinate in the air) instead of the deeper meaning (to deceive oneself).

There are other components and elements like simple witty sayings, proverbs, twisters/riddles, poems etc that are problematic for the students due to the shallowness of their knowledge in the language. Understanding the meaning of 'come', 'go', 'good morning' etc would not be enough to claim mastery of the language. Those identified problems and in fact many more which time and space would not permit the writer to

Post reading activities include ability to summarize effectively, underlining where necessary and not to be done excessively, note-taking which is another form of summarizing and which could be employed when the text-book is not that of the reader and then outlining, as this is the skeleton or framework of ideas that the writer has "dressed up" by expressing them in well written sentences and paragraphs. It is also important to note the importance of literary materials to language development. Language according to Atwell (1986) is always whole, social and exists for the purpose of meeting the communicative needs of the communicators. Atwell therefore calls for language teaching approach that will present language in a whole way noting that readers are also speakers, listeners and writers and to be any of these means being all of them. To make these realisable Onukwogu and Ochia (1997) suggest that our language teaching programmes should be sustained by a sound and robust literature components that is "divers, rich, authentic and culturally / ecologically relevant" (p.46).

According to them, literature will provide the opportunity for our students to listen to other people's voices shape their feelings, transmit and connect. In this regard, this writer shares the views of Onukwogu and Ochia (1997) and therefore suggests that our schools' libraries must be enriched with relevant literary materials in Yoruba and other Nigerian languages.

Teachers in both primary and secondary schools should endeavor to stimulate learners' interest in reading literary texts in Nigerian languages with the use of relevant audio-visual and print media. Learners should also be encouraged to participate in radio and television programmes. Not only that language and educational technology experts should also design language games for learners in the primary and secondary schools. Inter school debates and reading competitions should be organized by schools for Nigerian languages at the local, state and national levels.

CONCLUSION

The relationship of reading ability to scholastic success is not open to dispute; teachers and students alike are aware of it. Karling (1964), Strang and others have also commented that reading proficiency is the royal road to knowledge. Reading is essential to success in all academics. In modern life, learning depends upon one's ability to interpret the printed page accurately and fully. Therefore reading must be given all the attention it deserves.

In this paper, problems affecting reading efficiency in Yoruba among secondary schools have been discussed. Influence of English language, tonal nature of Yoruba, dialectical as well as inability of readers to interpret the figurative meaning of some expressions account for such problems. Maturity and freedom of readers from visual and other personality defects have been found to be important determinants of an efficient reader. For reading to be efficient, readers must be able to understand texts at the normal or acceptable speed depending on the nature of the material and the purpose it is expected to serve. Suggestions were also given as to how reading in Yoruba could be improved. If

mention affect the effective reading of Yoruba texts among secondary school students. One could then imagine the magnitude of problems that would be faced by a student who cannot engage in any meaningful silent reading when he or she cannot read alone correctly.

IMPROVING READING ABILITY IN YORUBA

The ability to read aloud and silently are both essential to the study of any language. Despite the fact that reading silently is the greatest amount of reading that is done all over the world, reading aloud is also useful especially to people who require to exercise the skill either as a matter of daily routine or as a means of earning their living like radio and television newscasters, clergymen and perhaps actors. As a result, reading aloud needs to be taken care of by the Yoruba teacher in the secondary schools as it is the only way in which information about the appropriate intonation pattern, articulation etc all of which are unmarked in the visual surface structure can be deduced. While teaching silent reading the views of Longe (1979) should be considered which include: the survey of material to be studied, skimming to get information from a mass of others to gain superficial comprehension like in reading for pleasure or preparing to read aloud; to study in some detail the content of what is read and to study the language in which the text is written as in literary criticism.

To aid reading efficiency in Yoruba, it might be good if the language teacher can borrow a leaf from Albert and Edward (1985) who classified reading activities into: pre-reading, during reading and post reading activities.

Pre-reading activities include creating interest in reading which could be done by providing students with suitable reading materials after which some actions in the texts is dramatized. Familiarization with some study procedures or methods like the five step SQ3R of Robinson (1970) where S stands for survey, Q for Questions, and 3R for Read, Reck and Review. Or Pauks (1984) SQ4R technique: S for survey, (to get started), Q for question (to focus attention) 4R: Read (with concentration), Record (by taking notes), Reck (by covering the whole page except for your marginal notes and then reciting aloud using the notes as a cue) and Reflect (by thinking about the information.) Under pre-reading activities, the teacher should present reading materials in such a way that prior knowledge is related to new information; students' attention could also be focused by way of provocative questions, curious excerpts, interesting headings etc and the purpose for which a material is to be read must be set or established by the teacher.

During reading activities, teachers should help the students to take note of stopper words and words in italics. In the absence of the teacher, students could consult their Dictionary if they could not get the meanings of those words. Teachers should help them to avoid excessive decoding, word-by-word reading (which could be treated by developing the child's ability to group the words into thought of units and to read in phrases) lip movement and sub vocal reading, finger pointing and head movements and in addition, perceptual span must be increased by showing increasingly longer words.

the suggestions are employed, it would definitely aid reading efficiency in Yoruba and its teaching right from the primary to higher levels of education.
It is also necessary for the government to mandate all Nursery and Primary schools to include local languages into their school programmes as a subject apart from making them the medium of instruction in the first three years in the primary schools.

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