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ANNUAL SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND SCIENCE EDUCATION CONFERENCE



FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MINNA



Book of Readings



Theme:

**CURRENT TRENDS IN SCIENCE AND
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

DATE: 24TH - 27TH NOVEMBER, 2005

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Mrs Aminu Gogo Taha

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READING IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE SOCIAL NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT

By

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Abstract

Environment and Education are inseparable under normal circumstances. The two are supposed to go parri passu and the environment is supposed to benefit from its educational system. In the Nigerian environment, English is regarded and taught as a second language. Reading is an indispensable aspect of any educational system and there is hardly any learning or development without reading. However, in Nigeria, reading is not given the attention and encouragement it deserves. This explains why students' performance in internal and external examinations is still being complained about. Both the home and the school do not provide reader friendly environments. This is seen for example in lack of appropriate learning facilities such as suitable homes, congested classrooms, poor lighting systems, inadequate furniture, lack of reading materials, functional libraries etc. This paper therefore mirrors the situation of reading in Nigeria by examining the problems it faces as well as offering worthwhile suggestions for improvement.

Introduction

The BBC English dictionary defines environment as everything around us that affects our daily life. For example, where we live and the people and things that affect us. Education is part of our social environment because it makes life worth living for us. There can however be no education where there is no reading because reading is the backbone of any educational system. This paper presents the situation of Reading in the Nigerian Environment. This issue has been of great concern to not only to the government but also curriculum planners, teachers, parents and even the entire populace.

The Role of Reading

Reading is one of the study skills which enables the acquisition of information. We read to be able to share the ideas, experiences, skills and talents of people from different environments. We also read about past events to furnish us with information of what happened before we were born. This enables us to re-direct our future excellently. Goodman (1997) sees reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves interaction between thought and language. Through this, the reader reconstructs a message as best as he can. Oyetunde (1997) considers it as a selective process which involves partial use of available language clues selected from perceptual input dependent on the reader's expectation. During processing, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected, or refined as reading progresses.

Reading ability according to Lawani (1997) depends on the structural essentials of the language in which the material is written but it further emphasizes the perceptual – cognitive and information processing activities demanded by such reading tasks. Chinn (1975) proposes that reading has a constituent of three components: getting the message, combining it with personal experience, and then doing something about it. Reading therefore is the most important tool for learning every subject of the school curriculum. There is little language learning where there is little reading. It is a key factor in the

success of an individual and in the development of a nation. Our environment – the Nigeria environment needs reading to enhance her political, social, economic, spiritual and educational development. Umolu (1997) sees reading as an individual's hope for the future, a ladder to his success. Full participation in today's society is largely dependent on the ability to read. Good reading ability is critical as a key to job efficiency and professional growth.

Reading in English as a second language in the Nigeria Environment

Experience, observation and researches – Oyetunde (1997); Andzayi (2004) have shown that reading in Nigeria is seriously bedevilled with a lot of problems, its importance to teaching and learning notwithstanding. The Nigeria environment is such that gives little attention to reading be it for pleasure or for recall. This phenomenon produces the following types of readers.

- (1) The reader who recites from the book without recognition or understanding of printed words.
- (2) The reader who calls words from the book with correct pronunciation but without understanding.
- (3) The one who can read easy books but not all the levels of books used in the class.
- (4) The reader who is in the upper class and has not learnt to read at all.
- (5) A reader who fall asleep immediately reading begins.

The genesis of these problems stems largely from the societal commitment to economic, political and social activities. Most of our students have no interest in reading and as such find it difficult to benefit from it. This contributes immensely to our students' poor academic performance. For if one does not read enough how would he obtain information from written materials? Economically, Nigerians are so engrossed in the desire to get rich or earn a living that even young and old literates devote little or no time to reading. In schools the level of education notwithstanding, students read only to pass examinations. In most cases, their books are pushed aside immediately the examinations are over. Most of their leisure times are dedicated to watching television programmes, video, CD and satellite dishes with little or no time to read.

Politically, most Nigerians are so engaged in political activities that they hardly have time for reading even if they are literate. Many engage in politics without making reference to books on political science. They just jump into it without looking left or right and in most cases fail the people who put them there. Most of them refer to politics as being a "dirty game" because they fail to obtain vital information relating to the field from printed materials written by experts in the field.

In the past, Nigerians had interest in reading particularly newspapers, novels, magazines, and historical books and in making diaries. But the situation has changed now. People are so pre-occupied with one problem or the other that they hardly have time for reading. On the whole, most Nigerians do not read as an extra-curricular activity which is necessary for intellectual development and the ability to handle emotional problems.

Moreover there are also problems arising from the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian society. For instance, in communities that are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, it is difficult to determine the particular language in which initial reading should be introduced. This is because, picking an indigenous language in a heterogeneous situation would make the language of initial reading unknown to the majority of the pupils, on the other hand, picking English would mean that a greater

read in a local language. Added to above is the fact that the English orthographic system unlike the indigenous languages has no letter – sound correspondence. This confuses the learner most especially as most of the books used for reading instruction at secondary and primary school levels are at their frustration level, Umolu (1996).

Another problem is that of poor concept of reading. Most of our students do not see reading as a way of obtaining information from the text. They therefore read poorly with the only aim of passing examinations. The interest to read is not there at all, thus Unoh (1983), Oyetunde (2004) claim that Nigeria on the whole lack interest for reading. They are so pre-occupied with the hustle and bustle of everyday life that they hardly have time for reading as an extra-curricular activity necessary for intellectual and emotional development.

Furthermore, reading in Nigeria is also affected by poor methodology. Some teachers, probably due to the inadequate number of English periods on the time table as well as lack of separate time allocation to reading are not aware that reading is or should be taught separately. The method of reading in most secondary and primary schools involves the teaching/reading for the class to listen or asking a student to read while others listen. At times, the students are asked to read a passage and answer the questions that follow them. In these situations, the students read without understanding. This also makes reading a frustrating and an uninteresting exercise, Oyetunde (1997).

To this, Ekpunobi (1990) also maintains that reading is often assumed to be taught during English lessons with writing, grammar etc. without teaching reading skills. It is therefore taught haphazardly which of course affects the reading habit of students.

Reading in Nigeria is also faced by the problem of functional libraries at primary and secondary levels. Libraries are of immense necessity if students are to cultivate the habit of extensive reading. Unfortunately, these do not exist in our schools. Adefidiya (1989) pointed out that the Nigeria government does not seem to have enough funds for a useful library since they do not recognize its importance. Hence, libraries are important for the intellectual development of the users and the nation.

Suggestions for Improvement

The problems confronting Reading in Nigeria can be tackled if the following suggestions are taken into consideration right from the pedagogical level.

Oral language foundation should be encouraged before he is exposed to reading in English language. For a child to read meaningfully in a language he needs to express himself fluently in his language or first language. Andzayi (2004) believes that to facilitate literacy in the second language, children should first of all be taught to read in their mother tongue. This belief is also shared by Goodman (1977), Coady (1979) and Oyetunde (1997). According to them, learning to read in the second language is much easier for one who is already literate in another regardless of how similar or dissimilar it is. The child does not have to relearn the process but only transfers the reading habits in his first language to the second one.

The average Nigeria home is illiterate, the school therefore has to compensate for what the home cannot provide. Teaching English as a whole has to be made learners friendly. The school should try to provide the necessary environment for teaching and learning. Experienced English teachers should be assigned to teach reading and such teachers should realize that English is our second and official language so its basic sounds and structures have to be taught before the children are exposed to reading. Oyetunde (1997) believes that teaching English has to start from the scratch.

Moreover, a person's first language is already satisfactory to him for his immediate needs, so for reading in second language to be facilitated, there should be the

motivation to read. Students at the initial level should be exposed to reading materials that make meaning to them. They should be exposed to reading things that are not only beneficial but also within their mental and intellectual capability.

Reading is also enhanced if there is some level of pedagogical empowerment. Teachers trained for teaching reading should do the right thing at the right time, Oyetunde (1997). Teachers should be empowered to teach reading not just for testing it by using active teaching methods that actually involve the children. To ensure a solid oral language foundation in children, the teacher should engage them in speaking and discussions. He should tell them stories and also listen to theirs and communicate to them that print is meaningful and that books give pleasure and information.

The environment, especially the school and classroom should be print rich by bringing pictures, messages on notice boards, walls or blackboards for pupils' consumption. Parents should provide a rich reading home background because the richer the home background the better the promotion of reading efficiency.

Moreover, reading should be given a separate time allocation on the time-table so that the teacher attaches importance to it and as such teach it very well.

The school system also has to be improved at least in the provision of reading materials and libraries. Parents who can afford to buy textbooks should give them to the children to bring to school for others to use. Old calendars, cards can also be used to teach reading in the absence of textbooks. These can be photocopied or put on stencils for wider consumption.

Furthermore, the school curricular should be expanded in colleges and universities to include appropriate reading courses and other language skills.

The teaching of literature should be encouraged at all levels of education. This is because literature more than any other subject exposes the child to both intensive and extensive reading. In fact, literature should be made a compulsory subject at secondary school level. Bright & McGregor (1976) maintained that pupils who speak a first language in which little has been written and for whom English is a second language must read English Literature, otherwise they have no means of literary education.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a critical look at the situation of reading in the Nigerian environment. In doing this, it focused attention on problems confronting reading and offered worthwhile suggestions for improvement. It is therefore hoped that reading in Nigeria will be accorded its rightful place and position in this country because no environment can dream of any academic or national development without reading.

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