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**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL INNOVATIONS AND
SUSTAINABLE LEARNING**

Volume 10, Number 1, May 2019, ISSN: 0795-6789

CENTER FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH, WRITING AND TRAINING

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
INNOVATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE LEARNING**

Volume 10, Number 1, May, 2019 ISSN: 0795-6789

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International Journal of Scientific and Cultural Innovations and Sustainable Learning
Volume 10, Number 1, May, 2019

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Published, 2019

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ISSN: 0795-6789

International Journal of Scientific and Cultural Innovations and Sustainable Learning
Volume 10, Number 1, May, 2019
Copyright © Centre for Advanced Research, Writing and Training ISSN: 0795-6769

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MASTERING READING AND VOCABULARY OF ENGLISH FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Of all the international languages, English is the most recognized. It has three basic categories of use according to Quirk and Green Baum (1985): it is used as a native language, a second language (L₂) and a foreign language (FL). Apart from other function English performs in Nigeria, it plays the role of medium of communication in schools. It is taught as a subject in primary and secondary schools as well as a course in universities and colleges of education. English is also taught as general studies in polytechnics and monotechnics. All undergraduates study and pass English course before graduation. Considering the status and significance of the English language in Nigeria, it is worrisome to observe that many Nigerians lack a grasp of it. This paper is, therefore, tailored towards addressing 'reading' and 'vocabulary development' which are exercises that are sine-qua-non for a proper understanding of the English language and eventual effective communication. The paper concludes that having a good knowledge of phonetics and phonology of English, rich vocabulary as well as high intelligent quotient is relevant to effective reading and eventual effective communication. The paper also makes appropriate recommendations to stake holders vis-à-vis the issue in question.

Introduction

The English language is the major lingua franca in Nigeria. It is a very important legacy in the language culture of Nigerians left behind by the British colonial masters. English, a member of the Germanic language group according to Umera-Okeke (2009), has been able to plant itself every where in the world as Uhumwangho (2000) notes. "The language situation in Nigeria has also necessitated its becoming a national language. Since there is yet to be any policy statement by Nigeria declaring any indigenous language, a national language, it is not difficult to conclude as Jowitt (1991) did that "English continues to perform many of the functions of a national language as well as those of an official language".

The sad point, however, is that a good number of Nigerians spoken and written English leaves much to be desired. Students fail to understand that English is the most basic subject in their general education. Certainly, English can become rewarding when its potential is discovered according to Guth (1977) as recalled by Uhumwangho (2000).

Reading

This is very important exercise hence Francis Bacon quoted in Odo (2009) stipulates that "reading maketh a man" (113).

Reading is not only a complex process but also a meaningful interpretation of printed/written symbols. This is why Thurndike regards reading as a form of reasoning and argues that "understanding a paragraph is like solving a problem in mathematics" (Odo, 2009).

What actually is reading? Reading is the meaningful interpretation of written or printed words with the aid of the eyes and the brain. Oba quoted in Oluikpe (1995) sees reading as "the passing of information from the writer to the reader who... must learn to isolate concepts that are represented by black and white symbols" (145).

Reading occurs at the level of symbols and the level of concepts. At the level of symbol, the reader recognizes words, classifies and interprets them. At the level of concepts, the words recognized call from the reader's brain certain shared experiences. The reader then follows the writer's line of thought, recreating in his mind, the mental images transmitted by the writer.

Types of Reading

There are different types of reading depending on the criteria for classification. These could be the manner of reading, purpose of reading or even the range of materials read. As Longe in Ubahakwe (1979) notes, 'Reading aloud and silent reading' exist.

1. **Reading Aloud:** Reading aloud is a daily activity which many people participate in: students, teachers, newscasters etc. are involved. Reading aloud requires the reader to observe correctly all the mechanics of English so that he or she can communicate effectively with the listeners. The eyes move faster than the voice during a reading aloud exercise. Here, the reader has to put the principles of phonetics and phonology into use if he or she is to be understood. Particularly, if the reader has international audience, otherwise, he or she will not achieve international intelligibility. The reader has to be careful to pronounce the words which are often mispronounced correctly. Some of such words are: worm, wicked, where, architect, furniture, dwarf, among others.

2. **Silent Reading:** The requirements of this type of reading is not uniform. It varies according to the purpose of reading. This type of reading is used to scan materials to be studied, skim information, gain superficial information of a text as well as study a text. From the above uses of this type of reading, it can be inferred that skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading are types of silent reading.
3. **Chorus Reading:** This is the type of reading whereby all the students in a class are made to read a passage simultaneously, that is, at the same time. Often, the students in a class are made to read after a teacher. This type of reading is practised so that students can pronounce words correctly and recognize words rightly. Chorus reading does not aid understanding of a text, carry all students along as they may have different reading speeds, and it does not allow students to maintain all the expressions and intonation of the model reader. A good number of educators have the notion that chorus reading is an effective way of speaking English, as a matter of fact, there are no communicative aspects to it. Its main aim is to practise pronunciation. It should not be the main activity in a lesson.
4. **Partner Reading:** This is a type of learning technique in which two students co-operate to read a material that has been assigned to them. The technique in question is often used as an aspect of the peer assisted learning strategies (P.A.L.S).

P.A.L.S is a teaching programme in which teachers meticulously pair students with one another. This technique allows students to take their turns in reading and it provides each student with feedback as a way of assessing understanding of what is read.

Teachers could use this activity to pair student of different categories to support language development.

Bad Reading Habits to be avoided

These habits make us slow readers. A slow reader is a bad reader, hence the habits are bad. An average reader should be able to read more than 150 words in a minute. Any figure below that makes one a bad reader. According to Uhumwangho (2000), "head movement, vocalization, sub-vocalization, pointing to words and regression are bad reading habits."

We should, however, note that 'regression' is to be seen as a bad reading habit if it is not intentional because sometimes, a reader may regress intentionally to enhance his or her understanding of what is being read.

Good reading habits that can help us to achieve optimum reading speed and enhance understanding include:

- (i) **Constant Practice:** It is not possible to acquire complete reading skill within a short time. It is, therefore, good for us to time ourselves often and read various texts in order to monitor and improve our speed.
- (ii) **Increasing the Eye Span:** The eye-span is the number of words a reader can grasp at once while reading. Fast readers grasp three to five words or more in an eye span while slow readers often grasp words one by one while reading. Increasing the number of words in an eye span is encouraged.
- (iii) Applying the appropriate reading speed will make reading effective.
- (iv) Avoiding all the bad reading habits earlier stated will make reading fast.

Reading is often affected by many variables. Such variables include: The IQ of the reader, his or her background, linguistic ability and intellectual training (Unoh 1979 in Odo, 2009). According to Azikwe (1998), "Reading is not just a skill which include eye movement, speech, comprehension and vocabulary" (139). From the above view, it is clear that a rich vocabulary is essential for success to be achieved in reading. We will, therefore, examine it briefly.

Vocabulary

Mowarin (2006) views vocabulary as words and their precise dictionary meanings. The precise dictionary meaning of a word is the literal meaning which is referred to as its denotation in Semantics. We can always talk of the active vocabulary and the passive vocabulary of a person. A person's active vocabulary refers to the words he or she knows and uses in daily speech while his or her passive vocabulary refers to the words that he or she knows but does not use in daily speech.

Possessing a rich vocabulary is very relevant to an overall success in the English language since words are the 'tools' with which language is spoken and written.

While writing on vocabulary development, Abamba (2004) suggests that word formation processes such as affixation, conversion, compounding, blending, etc are means of developing vocabulary.

Vocabulary can also be developed through the study of lexis. This includes synonyms, antonyms, homophones, polysemy, hyponyms etc.

An individual can enrich or develop his or her vocabulary by listening to models when they speak. This can be done through listening to radio programmes or news in British Broad Casting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA) and Cable Network News (CNN) stations.

Furthermore, vocabulary can be enriched if novels or any text written in faultless English are read. Another reliable method of developing the vocabulary is to look up always the meaning of any unfamiliar word in the text read from the dictionary.

From about 450 AD, the English language has passed through different stages. For instance, between 450 to 1100, it was called 'Old English', from 1100 to 1500 it developed into middle English, from 1500 till date it grew into modern English. In fact, it has developed from one stage to another and has attained the status of a global language. It is for this reason that we shall now examine it as a global language.

English and Globalization

According to Crystal quoted in Ogunsiyi (2003) and recalled by Omerogor (2009), "English has attained the status of a global language" (57). English by the manner it is now used, is a world language. English, French, Russia etc are among dominant languages of the world today. As at the year 2006, it was reported that "380 million people speak English as their primary language, and more than 250 million speak it as a second language" (Emenanjo, 2006).

As far as human language is concerned both Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Globalization have enthroned English with its many varieties as the world's global language of widest communication. What is more? The PC business originated in America, the internet also originated there as Emenanjo observes. Many of the digital discourse like e-mail, video-mail, e-banking etc. across the internet were initially conducted in the English language. As early as 2001, English had been enthroned as the language of the internet and

...will remain disproportionately so...
...over time, more people will learn
English and this will solidify English
As a global language (Emenanjo, 2006)

By 2005, 80% of electronically stored information in the world was in English, 66% of the world research scholars read English. English is dominant in business and international diplomacy as the language used in 52% of all international transactions.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have subscribed to the view that good knowledge of phonetics and phonology is relevant to effective communication, rich vocabulary and high intelligence quotient (IQ) are also relevant to effective reading. Furthermore, we have understood that the English language developed from old English to middle English, from middle to modern English and eventually emerged as a global language.

Given the importance of mastering reading and vocabulary development, we recommend that teachers of the subject should teach these aspects of the

language with more intensity and extensity. Curriculum planners should give more prominence to them; government should provide the necessary infrastructures that will enhance the performances of students and teachers while parents and guardians should encourage their children and wards to give attention to effective reading and acquisition of rich vocabularies in order to achieve effective communication for national development. If communication in all spheres of life is effective, national development is assured and national crises will be highly minimized.

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