

POOR READING SKILLS: HINDERANCE TO EFFECTIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper is on Poor Reading Skills: Hindrances to Effective Learning. The paper reveals that reading serve different purposes in different subjects. It states that whatever the aspect of life one is considering, one discovers that the ability to read efficiently enhances individual ability to function in an effective manner. Reading readiness is structured into early learning. As such, reading specialists are trained to render special services in developmental and remedial reading processes. The few numbers of pupils that have reading disability is enough reason to attract attention. The paper sees reading problem as mechanical problem which hinder efficient reading and are common among secondary school students particularly those who have not undergone any reading readiness program and include the following factors; finger-printing, vocalizing, subvocalizing, and reading word to word etc. The paper x-rays some factors responsible for reading problems to include; poor reading culture in Nigeria, faulty beginning, language development at home, physical factors, mental health, brain damage, high cost of books, incompetency in teaching, poor methods, emotional factor and inadequate provision of school library services. Recommendations were put forward on how the teachers, schools, and parents can improve on the reading skills of the child.

Keywords: Poor Reading, Skills, Hindrances, Effective Learning.

1.0 Introduction

Reading serves different purposes in the lives of different categories of people who are literates. In the schools, it is the basis for learning different subjects. Whatever the aspect of life, one discovers that the ability to read effectively enhances individual ability to function in an effective manner. A reader does not approach text merely for the purpose of reading the language itself but for a purpose other than reading the words on the page. We read to obtain information which is presented in a written form. A reader wants to have access to the content expressed in writing. The content can be affective (emotional), referential (factual) or cognitive (intellectual) (White, 2008: 87). The Affective elements refer to the emotional gratification or pleasure we derive from reading. When one reads a referential material, the intention is to obtain factual information that will be of help in operating on one's environment, for example, obtaining information on how to operate a machine. The third purpose refers to our desire to read a material which will help to sharpen our cognitive skills so that we might manipulate ideas more effectively, for example, being able to present a case in a more convincing manner. Given the importance of reading, one understands why Macauley (1992:93) considers as very unfortunate, the failure of developing countries to giving reading its place. In the school programme unlike what is obtained in many developed countries. In many developed countries for example, Great Britain, the United States and Canada - a great deal of emphasis placed on reading in the school programme. Reading readiness is structured into early learning. Reading specialists are trained to render special services in developmental and remedial reading processes. Unfortunately, in the developing countries with bilingual and multilingual, situations where well-structured reading readiness programme is desperately needed, the facilities are extremely slim if they exist at all. In Nigeria, when a student does not do well in

class, attention is usually focused on the peers he moves with, the type of school he attends – private or government approved, teacher qualification etc., but no one puts into consideration such student's ability or disability. Reading disability is enough reason to attract attention. At this junction, it is pertinent to view some of the problems associated with reading disability.

2.0 Literature Review

Mechanical Problem

Mechanical Problems hinder efficient reading. They are very common among secondary school students particularly those who have not undergone any reading readiness program and include the following factors; finger-pointing, vocalizing, sub-vocalizing, and reading word to word etc.

Finger-pointing: that is pointing at the words as one reads. It slows down the reading speed and makes reading a very tedious process.

Vocalizing: that is reading the words aloud as one is reading to oneself. The normal thing to do is to read silently when reading to oneself to enable one to employ fast reading techniques. When one develops the bad habit of reading aloud to oneself, he may find it impossible to understand any text except he reads it aloud. Such a person can hardly benefit from reading in the public library.

Sub-vocalizing: that is reading under the breath. This is similar to vocalizing except that the reader who practices it is reading under the breath.

Reading word to word: this is reading word to word instead of covering a chunk of words with one eye span. Reading word to word is like finger pointing. Reading is meant to be done in chunks for example, 'in the land/ of the blind/one eyed man/is the King'. The sentence just read was done in four eye movements (that is to say that the sentence is covered as four chunks or four eye fixations). If the sentence is read word to word, there would be as many eye movements as the words, making the reading process exceedingly slow. A fast read would have read the sentence above in larger chunks, this reading the sentence in a very short time.

Mental Operations

This relates to such issues as inability to distinguish between main ideas for examples, to understand the reader's intention or the writer's intention to carry out a reasonable evaluation of the read etc. Greenwood (1981:89) has identified the cognitive skills of comprehension. They include the ability to anticipate both the form and content, identifying the main idea or ideas, recognizing relationships between the main idea or ideas and their expansion etc. follow a sequence (examples), events instructions, stages of an argument, infer from the text (read between the lines), draw conclusions, and recognize the writer's purpose and attitudes.

Text Processing

Text processing is a very demanding task and a large number of secondary school students are ill-prepared for the task. Writing on the Nigeria situation for example, Mohammed (1983:361); stated that one could say without much fear of contradictions that reading instruction in the secondary school in the last two decades has been operating on a rather low key. Many students even after completing secondary education may be in need of small group or individual remedial work to correct specific reading disability in both English and vernacular. One clear indication to that effect is that a great number of secondary school students cannot read most of the materials in the newspapers, job application forms and directions for performing various tasks.

Reading Process

Reading is the process by which we derive meaning from prints. It has been stated earlier that reading involves mechanical and mental operations. The first aspect of reading is mainly a visual task. It has to do with decoding or deciphering the mark on the page. To do this, the reader moves his eyes from left to right (in the case of the Roman scripts) and sends signal to the brain. The second aspect of reading involves cognitive operations. The visual information received has to be processed. If a person reads aloud but fails to understand the content of the passage, he is said to be barking at the prints. Processing the visual information received

permits one to derive meaning from what is on the page. This brings into focus the practice where by teachers spend a large amount of time (in the class) on reading aloud. The prevalent idea seems to be that the procedure helps the class to develop familiarity with the content while it serves a useful pronunciation practice. In actual fact many teachers use this technique as a cover up device for their failure to prepare their lessons. Reading aloud sessions are quite often unplanned activities and there are a number of reasons why extensive sessions of reading aloud should be discouraged. They include:

- (a) As poor readers stumble along with a reading session, they commit different kinds of errors and situational constraints which may not permit the teachers to comment on a number of such errors. These students, without the teacher intending this to be so, provide a poor model for others to listen. Eventually, some of these errors will be initiated by others.
- (b) These reading sessions prove to be boring to the learners. It may result in actions which get the teachers irritated and this may transform the reading session into a nightmare for everyone.
- (c) Materials tend to be written for specific purposes; some are written specifically for silent reading, others to serve as a basis for pronunciations of separate works, while some others are for practice and oral fluency. Sometimes materials designed for silent reading are used for oral fluency. These definitely cause problems.
- (d) The reading skill people use commonly in real life is silent reading. This is why silent reading should be the focus of reading activity in the classroom. In real life however, there are occasions where the skill of reading aloud is required but people usually use the opportunity to rehearse and try to work out the meaning of what they are going to read aloud. It must be pointed out that teachers should however, master the skill if good reading aloud in order to serve as models to learners during reading aloud sessions. Again, reading aloud sessions must be adequately planned so that they meet specific goals in the most economic manner possible.

Efficient Reading

In other to answer the question of efficient reading, it is useful to examine the two ends of a continuum with respect to the rate of reading. This refers to a very slow, painstaking study of a text in which practically every element receives close attention no matter its level of contribution to the overall meaning of the text or intention of the writer. At the other end of the continuum is located speed reading. Advocates of speed reading believe that reading a material with a very fast rate makes reading interesting and increases comprehension. It is based on relationship between one's purpose in reading a given text and the nature of the text. It involves switching styles. Therefore, efficient reading is the use of a reading rate that reflects both the nature of the material and the reader's intention.

Factors Responsible for Reading Problems

There are complex factors responsible for problems in reading. For Rosewell and Natchell (2006), they maintained that there is never a single cause but always a combination of adverse factors, which are interrelated. Very often the original are hard to identify. It often happens that a symptom exhibited could equally be the result of failure as it could be the cause of the failure. Donald (2007) argues that if a student exhibits emotional difficulties, it is necessary to design good remedial treatment to be as sure as possible the cause of reading difficulty. On the other hand, Onyenweotu (2011) posits that reading appears to be very insignificant in the secondary school scheme of work. In some instances, it is taught once a week or not at all. Many children in Nigerian secondary schools find it difficult to develop reading skills. This problem could be attributed to such factors as;

Poor Reading Culture in Nigeria

Different people and culture have different ways of relaxing and spending their leisure time. The people of developed countries of America and Europe do this by ways of reading, swimming, parties, dancing, and so on. However, in Nigeria people often prefer ceremonies and celebrations. This brings about poor reading culture in Nigeria. Many Nigerians do not read for pleasure. Most people only read to prepare for examinations. Onyenweotu (2011) and Akporobara (2009) observed that, Nigeria for historical reason is a country in which literary consciousness is deplorably low, so that without the idea of examination in view, reading is almost absent. This kind of apathy cuts across the different strata of the Nigeria the Nigerian society. Even the highly educated no longer care to read. Sofenwa (2007) regrets that even those who by the virtue of their professions who should update their knowledge are too lazy to read and hence become stale and obsolete. Elujoba (2007) describes the reading habit of an average Nigerian as utilitarian. Nigerians only read when there is need to do so. Olugbaje (1999) remarks that, Nigerians prefer to sleep, quarrel and even gossip, instead of reading for pleasure. The materialistic culture of Nigeria equally contributes to this poor reading habit. Many are so interested in becoming rich that they would not risk the time for making money on reading just for pleasure. Many remain illiterate unaware of what happens around them. We cannot afford to ignore this serious hindrance to reading. In view of this, Akporobara (1981) cautions that such lack of interest in reading amongst Nigerians can be disastrous for the society. As the saying goes, no one gives what he does not have. It follows that non reading adults cannot produce reading children. So, it is obvious that the poor reading attitude of many Nigerians towards reading contributes seriously to poor reading habit among school children.

Faulty Beginning

In his view, Nzeako (2014) observed that lack of reading culture in the nation stems from our faulty beginning. The colonial masters never intended to teach us how to read. As a result, reading among our predecessors was not established as a major instruction. He says that from the foundation of our education, reading was not given any prominence and no one ever thought of developing a skill in it. Consequently our teachers did not receive training in reading. The persistence of error has resulted in lack of exposure of the young to language and other opportunity to learn and acquire reading skills

Language Developing at Home

According to Fasoye (2005), language poses another serious problem to reading. For Tanet, (2001) wide reading in the developed countries of America and Europe can be attributed to the fact that their books are written in first language. Right from cradle they hear and interact in the same language, English as in the case of Britain and America. However, the case is different in Nigeria. Nigerian languages have only been recently introduced into the regular time table. In that sense, the children of today can be said to be more fortunate than their predecessors. This is because, they begin early to learn how to read and write in different Nigerian languages. However, the problem books in mother tongues still lingers/ language problem is still experienced even among adults because the population still has many illiterates in English Language in which most of our books are written. For example, Tanet (2001) observes that no specialized books or journals in science, history and any major disciplines are written in Nigerian language is a major hindrance to reading. If at home and its environment cannot provide the child with opportunity to use materials that are familiar with English Language, the learner's reading ability will be retarded. On the other hand, children who are from the middle and upper class homes who are encouraged practically and provided with the materials to speak English at home do not exhibit much reading difficulties at school unlike when the case is the opposite.

Intelligence

In the view of Schnell (2012), the problem of reading can be found more among the dull children than among the average and bright children. In the same vein, Mole, (2007), asserts that low intelligence level does not prevent a child from reading but it would almost certainly mean that he would start to read later than the average pupil. There is a high correlation between

reading ability and what is commonly called intelligence (DeBoer, 2000). According to DeBoer, (2000), the socio-economic background of many children in our Nigeria society does not help the growth of some learners' intelligence quotient (IQ). Hence, in a mixed class of children from upper, middle and lower classes, the teacher should be very cautious in the categorization of the children based on their IQs. However, children of high intelligence quotient find reading easier than their counterparts with low intelligence quotient.

Physical Factors and Mental Health

Critchelly, (2004) uses the term developmental dyslexia to refer to a constitutional disorder of the nervous system which produces reading disability. Rabinovitch (2002), speaks of primary reading disability to reflect a basic disturbed pattern of neurological organization that interferes with one's ability to deal with letter and words. He also attributed some reading failures to brain damage. According to Orton, (2011), the minimal brain damage account for serious reading difficulties, but Clements (2006), explains them as a product of minimal brain dysfunction. In line with this view, Smith and Crigan (2011) believe that chemical imbalance in the body accounts for reading problems in children. Problems associated with vision, (near-sightedness and far-sightedness, binocular difficulties etc.) perception (receptive and associational) and general health (poor health decreases vitality and causes fatigue and lack of concentration) are grouped under physical factors. Immaturity of vision, especially in the young child who is entering school, near sightedness and eye imbalance might interfere with a child's ability to read. Hence, acuity defects, may lead to improper association between spoken words and represented symbols. Nevertheless, unless children suffer severe vision and hearing difficulties, it would seem that these are not significant factor in reading failures. In any case it is always better to remove any condition that might inhibit progress in reading, Clements (2006). Though there were not be any direct link between disabilities and physical condition, it is obvious according to Karlin, (2002) that poor health interferes with learning. As learning to read poses difficulty to children, it would be of interest to eliminate any condition that increases such difficulty. Pupils who suffer from malnutrition, frequent cold, and other serious conditions will find it difficult to give serious attention to reading. DeBoer (2000).

Inattention and restlessness in class combined with frequent absence due to illness could inhibit the child from acquiring adequate reading skills. Since health is wealth, materially and intellectually, a healthy mind will be well disposed to learning than a sick one. It is a fact that fatigue, discomfort and pains will constitute distractions and discouragement to a child who is learning how to read. On the other hand, a child who is mentally sick due to family problems such as broken home, poverty and so on does not learn well and cannot make satisfactory progress in reading. DeBoer (2000) reveals that a leading cause of reading deficiency among children has been an unhappy home condition such as loss of one or two parents, maladjustment or conflict at in the home. The study concludes that emotional effects of unsatisfactory conditions in the home have serious adverse effect on children's reading. In such a situation, the teacher has to do with something to help such a child in the class. It could be in the form of advice, talking to the parents, referring the child to the school counselor and giving the child extra attention.

Brain Damage

Children who have suffered acute brain damage at birth or from diseases, or accidents often manifest inability to perceive word symbols. In these cases there is a confusion of figure and ground that affect their perception of letters and results in interference with word recognition. They are also easily distracted and hyperactive. Some successes in teaching such as children to read have only been realized in highly skilled teachers, (Bond and Tinker, 2007).

High Cost of Books

Some kin observers have remarked that the prevalent high cost of books does not enhance the prospects of children developing their reading habit. Consequently, children from poor family background are unable to acquire texts that will help them to read on their own, DeBoer (2000).

Incompetency in teaching and Poor Methods

When students are not properly taught reading skills, they get frustrated and follow the line of least resistance. They quit reading. Ekpunobi (2006) said that children cannot learn what they have not been taught. Obanya (2008) pointed out that ineffective and unplanned teaching of reading lesson contributes to poor reading. The writer then criticizes incidental teaching of reading skills rather than systematic teaching. He noted that in many instances the teacher undertakes the teaching of reading skills only while teaching English Language. Ekpunobi (1985) identified two ways in which teachers can influence the reading habits of their students: the teacher's own example of reading and the procedure adopted by the teacher in teaching reading skills. The incompetency of a teacher can model the methodology of teaching reading with its attendant problems for the students. Omuju (1985) stated that the reason for such incompetency is that most teachers lack the necessary training and interest needed to impact the skills of reading.

Emotional Factor

Hughan (2000) says that there are several elements which receive greater recommendations as contributed factors to poor reading among pupils. These are unfavorable emotional relationships such as ambivalences, rejection of the child by the parents, absence of the parents and siblings rivalry. It has been suggested that a broken home is a place where the child does not live with both parents but probably a better definition should place more emphasis on the separation of parents, their love and understanding of each other. It should also be remembered that a child should be deprived even though he or she lives at home, if the parents are unable to give him the necessary lovely care. A child from a poor overcrowded, emotionally unstable and uncultured home may be less interested in reading because he receives little encouragement from his home environment. According to Onyenweotu, (2001), the emotional maladjustment indicated poor personal and social adjustment, as well failure to deal with the demands of school life. The symptoms may range from aggression to passive withdrawal. Negative reaction from the teacher only compounds problem. Harris and Sipay (2007) said that an emotional problem may persistently interfere with concentration, attention motivation and strongly contributes to a child's reading problem. In other cases, failure in learning brings about gradually increasing discouragement. After a while, the child tends to avoid or evade reading. He is likely to become upset or confused when he cannot escape from reading.

Inadequate Provision of School Library Services

Inadequate provision of school library services is also one of the problems facing many institutions of learning in the country today. This has contributed to poor reading ability of students. Generally, most parents are too poor to provide their children with all their needed reading material. The school library is the only means of making up for these deficiencies, but accidentally, such library rarely exists in the Nigerian secondary schools. In most of the places, where the so called school library exists, they are ill-equipped. There are no chairs and reading tables. Most of the schools are old, outdated and not interesting. This limits the students' horizons and kills the interest of those who wish to read. In some of the schools where such libraries exist, there is no teacher-Librarian to organize the library materials properly or direct the students on how to make adequate use of the library materials. Students find it difficult to select the appropriate books to read when the library is not organized. This influences the reading interest. On this, Ezekiel, (2008) stressed that the existing schools libraries are very poor and not stimulating. Unless the problems of reading are diagnosed and remedial measures provided, the nation will continue to have some illiterate secondary school leavers and that would definitely go against the United Nations Millennium Development Goals of education for all and Nigerian dream of not producing a more literate society.

3.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on how the teachers, schools and parents can improve on the reading skills of the child.

The Teachers

Since the aim the teacher wants to achieve in teaching reading is to maximize comprehension for learners, he should therefore help the learners to develop strategies for developing their vocabularies and for raising their level of mastery of complex syntactic structures. This is helpful because failure to provide sufficient assistance to learners in the area of background knowledge is likely to pose a great threat to comprehension of the text hence Carrel and Erstahold (1988) point to this fact when they said that reading comprehension depends crucially on the reader's ability to relate information from the text to already existing background knowledge

Teachers should expose the learners to texts that reflect local background as well as different types of background relating to other countries where English is spoken particularly where it is spoken as a native language. This is helpful because having access to socio-cultural meaning enhances the reader's capacity to achieve comprehension of a text, which means that the reader's background knowledge of native language and context is relevant.

Some writers have suggested that for the purpose of enabling learners to have access to socio-cultural meaning, teachers should teach culturally loaded texts which occur in a text often.

Learners' reading should be limited to a simple topic or to a text of only one author. This idea here is that the practice whereby teachers provide learners with short and varied selections which never allow students to adjust to an author's style, to become familiar with specialized vocabularies of the topic or to develop enough content to facilitate comprehension actually forces learners to move from one frustration to another. Hence one's source of comprehension problem is interference between elements in the readers' cultural background and those in the native language context.

Teachers should provide readers with background information that helps readers to read the text with greater understanding. This may involve direct background information or the explanation of culturally loaded word or expression. Specialized vocabulary items which are likely to cause difficulty should also be explained.

Teachers should pay attention to learners' comment on the text they are studying. This helps him to discover areas where students genuinely need help.

The teacher should encourage the learners to read the topic of the text or heading of difficult sections of the text and say or write down what they expect to be the content of the text. This enables the learners to mention operation items expected to be contained in the text. The teacher should encourage the learners to scan for the items mentioned or predicted in the passage. The teacher should request the learners to identify the items which appeared in the text instead of the ones predicted.

Similarly, it is the duty of the teacher to encourage the learners to read the first or second paragraph of the passage under study after which students suggest what should follow or what follows in the text paragraph by way of having script knowledge or outcome of events.

The teacher should involve learners in the identification of main ideas and providing a title for the text by discussing the various suggestions, select acceptable ones and show why the rejects are considered unsuitable. Teachers should help the learners to perceive sequence relationships by way of indicating what follows. It is important for teachers to ensure that reading being the key to knowledge of all aspects of subject, is giving a high degree of attention in the school programme

The School

This factor has to do with the extent to which the school is able to provide adequate mechanism through which learners can help to read at the level that their reading materials demand. Therefore schools need to carry out the following functions. The school should provide a functional library where every student can practice reading.

The school has the duty to provide adequate space to permit different kind of group and individual reading tasks to be performed conveniently.

There should be adequate supply of different kinds of suitable materials. The school should allocate reasonable amount of time to the teaching of reading including remedial reading.

Time-table for teaching reading skills should be included in the school academic programme. Above all, the school should ensure that teachers who have been suitably trained for the teaching of reading are made available.

The Parents

This has to do with the extent to which the parents of the child enhance his efforts to achieve reading competence.

In order to improve the home environment of the Nigerian child, the parents should see the education of their children as a priority whether parents are rich or poor, literates or illiterates. Parents should try as much to be responsible enough to provide their children with convenient reading space and quite atmosphere for silent reading.

Parents should be duty bound to provide their children with good nutrition.

Parents who have education of their children in mind should assist and encourage their children to form desirable reading habits.

Parents should make available a library with relevant books for their children.

Parents should also help to enrich the child's background knowledge and experience with toys and real objects in the home.

4.0 Conclusion

Reading is very important to every literate member of the society as a source of information. It is a key and critical factor in all academic engagements especially in the teaching and learning process. Also, it involves mechanical and mental process to achieve comprehension. Since this is the case, all hands must be on deck—parents, elder siblings, teachers, school and the learners themselves to ensure the achievement of physical, intellectual, emotional and academic development of the Nigerian child.

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