

In-Text Vocabulary Recognition Strategy on Secondary School Students Achievement in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: *The focus of this article is on in-text vocabulary recognition strategy on secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension. Any written material is primarily a stretch of utterance which a writer uses to convey a message to an individual who of course is the reader. There are many devices available to a writer for conveying a message. Unless a reader is familiar with the devices a writer uses, the reader may never comprehend the message of the text. The ultimate purpose or goal of any reading effort is to first and foremost comprehend the message of the text being read. One cannot enjoy a given text if one does not comprehend it. The primary aim of this paper is to determine students' comprehension through in-text vocabulary recognition strategies, particularly at the secondary school level, In-text vocabulary strategies in reading, exposes readers to practical extraction of word meanings while reading any printed material. The paper highlights on vocabularies, comprehension, vocabulary types, and various levels of comprehension among others. The conclusion of this paper is drawn based on views of writers that in-text vocabulary recognition strategy is a necessary parameter for measuring cognitivity of every learner.*

Key words: *in-text vocabulary, recognition, achievement, comprehension.*

Introduction

Reading is an interactive process in which both the reader and the text contribute useful information to arrive at the intended meaning of the author. Reading is one of the most important activities of life through which one enters into the life and experiences of others and at the same time extends his/her knowledge, scope of experience and enjoyment in reading a text. Reading does not just involve the ability to decode or recognize the printed words, it also involves the ability to comprehend, to react, to assimilate, to summarize and utilize information from a text (Otagburuagu & Chukwuma, 2002). Effective word recognition is basic to all processes in reading, but the development of the understanding of word(s) meaning is fundamental to reading comprehension.

The art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone as it is one of the most important of language skills that distinguishes literate individuals from illiterate ones. Reading can simply

be defined as the ability to interpret or decode the printed or written words, and gain meaning out of them. It does not just involve the ability to decode or recognize the printed words. But includes ability to understand and respond positively to the information gained from a text. In line with this view, Kreidler (2003) indicates that reading is one of the language skills which if successfully acquired gives the learner a new medium of communicative power to get information from the printed text.

The reading skill which is the third stage in language skills leaning preceded by listening and speaking skills, is usually neglected in the teaching and learning situations of English as a second language in Nigeria. Onuigbo (1990) notes that this neglect stems from the erroneous assumption that the skills the learner already has as a hearer and speaker of the language automatically endows him/her with the ability to read the language. As a matter of fact, a normal child acquires the listening skill without much conscious effort, and at a very early stage in life, he/she begins to speak the mother tongue. The situation is different for the second language learner. Onuigbo maintains that until the learner of a second language passes through organized and a formal instructional stage, the sounds of the target language are mere noises while the graphic symbols are mere scratches.

Smith (2009:8) points out that:

Though the four language skills play a crucial role in human learning or intellectual activities reading plays the most crucial role in formal learning situations which demands effective use of books and other written or printed materials for intellectual development.

It is clear from the scholar's view that reading is paramount to human intellectual development.

The In-text Vocabulary Recognition Strategies:

Vocabulary recognition may be explained to mean ways in which the reader, in the natural process of reading puzzles out the meaning of unfamiliar or partly-familiar words that he/she meets in a text. This puzzling out, guessing, deciphering or decoding is what distinguishes vocabulary recognition from vocabulary development (Ugbor, 2006). In-text vocabulary is "the deliberate and systematic expansion the learner's brain has of a target word stock with the objective of enabling the learner to use the word, he thus learns in speech or writing". The scholar indentifies other forms of in-text vocabulary recognition to include; lexical familiarization, unchaining nominal compounds, searching for a synonymous word analysis. Good vocabulary recognition strategy involves a worthwhile choice of words and methods. Some methods which may be helpful in in-text vocabulary recognition strategy include:

- The sight word recognition
- Word analysis

- Contextual clues
- Use of dictionary

The sight word recognition decoding involves the ability to recognize words immediately with minimum amount of visual information. It implies the identification of words on the basis of visual feature relationship in configuration as a whole and not by the synthesis of information about individual letters or letters group. On the importance of this skill Oyetunde (2001) highlights that:

As this skill is highly needed by students, one of the most important ways to develop it in them is to react to what they read accordingly. The teacher can effectively do this by setting a purpose for his students reading programme. It is believed that students who spend most or enough of their time in the words and think about the content of their reading will become familiar with the most commonly used words and expressions, the consequence of which is a very rich vocabulary.

The quotation above indicates that students who spend most of their time in learning words meanings always get familiar with such passage expressions.

On the words analysis, Idris (2005) contends that: “this involves studying the internal structure of the word by engaging in sounding out words and analyzing letters or parts of words that are not instantly recognized from sight”. There are two types of word analysis: Phonic analysis and structural analysis. Phonic analysis refers to the study of graphemes or letters sounds and blending of these sounds to obtain an appropriate pronunciation of a word. Oyetunde (2001:11) states that: “The goal of teaching phonic analysis is that it will enable the learners to pronounce words that they do not recognize as sight words as well as enhance effective guesses of their meanings”. Thereupon, the teaching of phonic analysis has its limitations. The obvious limitations of phonic analysis is that it involves the learning of so many complex rules with their exceptions, which may result in overloading the short term memory of the reader since phonics is only one method of word analysis, its application in the classroom should come as the last resort. It is imperative that in situation where its uses become necessary, it is advisable that teachers should always select for classroom discussion words that are already within their learner’s reading schema. The teachers of English Language in relation to the above assertion should adopt good structural analysis that would enhance learners understanding of comprehension passages.

- *Structural Analysis*: This according to Idris (2005) involves segmentation of words into their various meanings bearing parts of phonemes such as root words, prefixes and suffixes, as a means of determining their meanings.

This effective use of structural analysis is a function of the readers' adequate knowledge of the meaning of the common root words, prefixes and suffixes. One obvious way of encouraging learners to use structural analysis is to expose them to the meaning of the most common root words and affixes that frequently occur in English Language. The teacher could then give the learners some exercises in analyzing the various roots or prefixes in words and synthesizing their meanings. For much effectiveness, students can be given root words and instruct them to provide their prefixes and suffixes. Dallman (2001:28) agrees that structural analysis of words deals with both word variants and word derivations. He maintains that:

A word variant is a word that deviates from the root word according to the ease number and gender of nouns; the tense voice and mood of verbs and the comparison of adjectives and adverbs. Thus, variants of the noun, prince are princes and princess, of the verb cook are cooks, cooked, cooking.

The issue of word variants and derivations was introduced earlier in Burmeister's description between basis and total vocabularies (Burmeister, 2004). He contents that "word derivations are words from root words through the addition of prefixes and/or suffixes such as likeable and uncomfortable". Learning compound words, sometimes through identification or recognition of the parts of polysyllabic words through the aid of syllabication is also part of structural analysis. The basis of word derivations are the prefixes and suffixes application in word formation. Dictionary use in vocabulary recognition involves teaching the learners how to use the dictionary as a source of or a means by which they could discover for themselves the meaning of unknown words through consulting appropriate sections (Ogbe, 2006).

The Term "Vocabulary and Types"

Vocabulary is defined in many ways. It could be defined as the total number of words which make up a language or range of words known to or used by a person in a trade, profession, or a book containing a list of words ... with definitions and translations (Sally, 2006). Emenike and Odeyemi (2002) opine that: Vocabulary refers to words and their meanings: Most teachers believe that vocabulary teaching involves the teaching of new words. Vocabulary means the words stock of a language available to the users of that particular language. Vocabulary of the English language is problematic for foreign learners and users of the language because of its complexity in nature. Several difficulties that students often face in understanding reading materials in the English language stem from the vocabulary problems (Otagburuagu & Chukwuma, 2002).

According to Emenike and Odeyemi (2002) there are four vocabulary types namely; listening, reading, writing and speaking vocabularies. Explaining further the scholars are of the view that listening and reading vocabulary are of the recognition type produced by someone who is communicating ideas to an audience while speaking and writing vocabularies are the

production type used to produce the communication in various facets. Sally (2006) indicates two types of vocabularies; receptive and expressive vocabularies. The receptive vocabulary is composed of words recognized through reading and listening and is usually several times larger than the expressive vocabulary which is made up of words used when speaking and writing. Total vocabulary is composed of words we recognize and or use in receptive and expressive ways.

Similarly basic and total vocabularies arise out of consideration of word roots and their variants and derivatives, besides compound words formed out of a merger. Burmeister, (2004) points out that if “sing” is a word, in the listing, sing, sang, sung, sings, singer and singing, do we have one word or words, and if ‘air’ is one word and ‘port’ another word, is airport a third word? All this means that it is not easy to answer the question, what is a word?

Productive Vocabulary:

The English language contains over 500,000 words some of which are general words used in everyday conversation and in writing materials of a non-technical nature. Others are technical words related to specialized fields of study such as the physical science, the biological sciences, and the social sciences (Williams, 1990).

There are some words we know so as to speak and write them in different contents. There are other words we know in the sense that we understand what they mean when we listen to them or read them. Words of the former kind make up our productive vocabulary.

The productive vocabulary which we use for speaking and writing is smaller than our receptive vocabulary. This productive vocabulary is sometimes referred to as the active vocabulary in the sense that a word can be recalled almost instantaneously when we need it. As far as second language is concerned, a minimum productive vocabulary has been estimated at 3000-4000 words (Williams, 1990).

Receptive Vocabulary:

Our receptive vocabulary is also called our latent vocabulary, in that it exists but, is not noticeable until some future time. The content of a word provides a number of clues as to the meaning of that word. All that is required is to grasp the meaning of the word. There are many words which is necessary for us to recognize but which we do not have to have in an active sense. Students need not be made to put into productive use all the words they come across while listening.

Vocabulary Recognition in Reading

Research on the importance of word knowledge has consistently shown that vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading comprehension.

Oyetunde (2001:6) highlights the pre-eminent role which word knowledge plays in reading comprehension in the following words, “understanding the vocabulary is second only to the faster reasoning in the process of comprehension. Some writers would say that recognition is more important than reasoning. It is sufficient to say that comprehension is significantly promoted by attention to vocabulary growth”. Dechant (1964:24) reiterates that:

Vocabulary seems to be the most significant determinant of reading comprehension. Materials are more easily understood when there are few difficult words than when they are many. They are more difficult when they contain words that call for concepts that are strange and rare.

McCullough (2007) gives four levels of an individual’s word knowledge to include:

- Words that are completely unknown to the reader.
- Words that may appear just unknown to the reader yet he/she can define, predict or form concepts about their meanings. This is called the reading vocabulary.
- Words that may appear just familiar to the reader. They are in his vocabulary knowledge though with either levels of meanings unknown to the reader. This is called the recognition vocabulary.
- Words that are well-known to the reader such words must have been already known by the reader and he has already made them part of his sight vocabulary, he can recognize them as well as define them by giving levels of meanings. This is called the mastered or owned vocabulary.

Gani-Ikilama (2004) states that lexical items are actually used to communicate meanings when speaking and writing. He is of the view that context makes the items clear to the learner.

Jowitt (1991) states that the main aim of vocabulary teaching is to enrich learners’ word power to enable him cope with the increasing demand on him to use the English language in a wider variety of situations.

Comprehension

Comprehension is necessary for all types of reading and is dependent upon many factors. Comprehension itself is simply the understanding of what one is reading while one is reading it. Comprehension is a very complex process which is anchored on understanding of what one has read (Enyi and Ereke, 2011). Some of these factors may include the nature of the reading materials, socio-cultural environment of the learners; difficulty level of the reading material at the secondary level, task in the second language situation. There is the issue of literacy quality of the content suitability to the age and maturity of the reader, the length of the reading material and then, the reading interests of the learners. Basic to all the considerations above is that the reader’s

ability to recognize the printed words, and derive meanings out of the reading materials must be present. Effective word recognition is basic to processes in reading; the development of the understanding of word meaning is basic to reading comprehension (Agwu and Maduabuchi, 2009). Jenkinson (2002) agrees with the above statement as he acknowledges that reading activity will bear little fruit unless the reader is fully aware of the meaning of the word he utters. Agwu and Maduabuchi (2009) also state that it is sufficient to say that comprehension is significantly promoted by attention to vocabulary growth. Dechant (1964) reiterates that vocabulary seems to be the most significant determinant of reading comprehension.

Similarly, the desire of teachers to increase comprehension in learners is almost universal. Unfortunately training of the students in the extension of vocabulary is frequently ineffective because the attempts to develop a wide functional vocabulary are rarely systematic.

Traditionally, vocabulary development takes the following forms; students are given list of words which they look up the definition in the dictionary and use each word in a sentence, they memorize their definitions for a subsequent quiz. They are quizzed on the words periodically to determine whether or not they can recall and use the definitions as they were memorized. This is rather a meaningless ritual (Jenkinson, 2002). Therefore, the definitions as selected and memorized by the students are frequently not correct, for the context in which the words are being studied.

In the present era, 21st century, the ways in which learners could be taught to recognize words and understand their meanings have been systematized and a variety of well-established procedures have been evolved. Among these procedures include the cloze procedures and the in-text vocabulary recognition strategy. There are some principles that govern the teaching of English language vocabulary as noted by Akpan (1996). These principles have to do with the selection of passive and active vocabulary to be taught which automatically depends on the recommended textbooks or syllabuses, the grading of course work and then, presentation (Method) used in teaching vocabulary to students at this level. It is quite alarming that with all the principles yet provided for the teaching of vocabulary in Nigerian secondary schools, students' achievement in the English language still leaves much to be desired.

Impediments to Reading Comprehension

Many studies suggest that not only intelligence but appropriate levels of cognitive development, including vocabulary and concept formation are pre-requisite to comprehension (Sharon, 2008). In addition, the tone of the writer, his/her attitude towards a topic and the reader, all apparently influence the comprehension of the learner.

Smith (2009) maintained that comprehension is the acquisition of information above meaning or the extraction of meaning from a text. Sharon (2008) outlines some causes of breakdown in reading comprehension as follows: failure to recognize letters, reader's failure to

recognize a particular lexical items, failure on the reader's part to recognize the grammatical relations which exist between the lexical units or even the failure to grasp the semantics of a particular grammatical item in a particular context; failure on the reader's part to grasp an author's attitude to his/her writing; and failure of the reader to apply logical principles adequately.

Comprehension Levels

There are however three levels of comprehension. These are; literal, interpretive and critical comprehension. Interpretive and critical comprehension dovetail and the distinction between them is not glaring. Similarly, we will treat both interpretive and critical comprehension as inferential comprehension for inferential comprehension subsumes both (Onukagu, 2003).

- *Literal Comprehension*: Literal comprehension is the skill of understanding directly stated facts, ideas and details as well as the understanding of how a term or a word is used in a context. Literal comprehension is a basic or foundation skill which every teacher must and should endeavor to teach his/her learner. In this level of comprehension, author(s) use details to shed light on the ideas or points they present. It also shows how author(s) explain words in context to promote the understanding of words that are very vital in reading comprehension. This is because words are the units which authors combine and manipulate in order to convey their messages, ideas and opinions. A word may be an impediment to the comprehension of a sentence and by implication, the impediment to the comprehension of a paragraph.

The context clues provide meaning units to the word an author feels could frustrate a reader and hinder his or her understanding of the meaning of the sentence in which the word occurs. Understanding the clues which an author provides to explain the meaning of a word is known as literal comprehension.

- *Inferential Comprehension*: Inferential comprehension is a much higher order skill than literal comprehension. Inferential comprehension is reading between the lines to understand or figure out what an author implies but which is not directly stated in the text (Onukagu, 2003). This is absolutely correct. Therefore, inferential comprehension is more than that. Inferential comprehension is reinforced when the reader uses his or her non-visual elements to arrive at the meaning that the text conveys which are not directly stated in it. It also entails making value statements in which the quality or correctness of the text is evaluated. Besides, it also entails understanding the tone and mood of an author as well as the purpose for which the author wrote the text. Similarly, inferential comprehension can only be possible where the reader has a rich and diverse non-visual element. Whereas literal comprehension relies extremely on the visual element of the writer text, inferential comprehension relies heavily on the non-visual element (Lasasi, 2003).

Pertinently, inferential comprehension is an educated guess. It is an educated guess because a number of factors must inform the guess. Inferential comprehension is a way of thinking. During the thinking, one draws from one's previous experiences. Based on the

experience one is familiar with, one can then interpret the purpose, tone or mood that informs the experience which an author is conveying in his text.

- *Critical Level Comprehension:* At this level of comprehension, the reader is assumed to have applied both literal and inferential to comprehend the message of the writer. The reader here begins to question the author's use of words in a particular context, doubt some details as presented by the author. The reader at the critical level of comprehension may agree or disagree with author(s) point of view. The reader begins to criticize, evaluate and question the techniques used by the author in the text (Enyi and Ereke, 2011).

At this level, the reader is assumed to have understood all the information or message(s) presented in the text by the writer.

Conclusion

It is imperative that reading plays the most crucial role in formal education which demands effective use of books and other written or printed materials for intellectual development. In-text vocabulary recognition strategy helps the reader to holistically extract meaning(s) from any reading material(s) with reduced difficulties. Comprehension of a material is subject to bias and attitudes of the readers, total environment within and outside the school interests and purposes of the reader, cognitive limitations of the reader, the genre or type of presentation can make or mar understanding of any reading material.

Conclusively, bringing meaning to the printed pages indicates more accurately the reciprocal process between the printed symbols and the mind of the reader. Words need to be understood during reading. Students were discovered to use types of vocabularies which include receptive and expressive vocabularies, basic and total vocabularies. Vocabulary can have denotative or connotative meanings or both. Learners always have reading vocabulary, recognition vocabulary, mastered or owned vocabulary and vocabulary that are completely unfamiliar or unknown to them.

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