



Enhancing Readability Potentials of Senior Secondary Schools Students: Imperative of Literature in English

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ABSTRACT

Ability to read is very important to students' academic success at all levels of education. The write-up therefore focuses on enhancing readability potentials of senior secondary schools' students: an imperative of literature in English. A holistic review on reading was made as explained and defined by some scholars. Also, some barriers or hindrances to students' ability to decode graphic symbols of sounds (reading) was attempted. Also, some factors that can be used to assess students' readability potentials were extensively looked at and reviewed. Solutions or panaceas to students' poor readability potentials and ability were discussed. Literature as a subject was extensively discussed as well as its functions to individuals and society. Conclusions were made and premised on the conclusions, recommendations were made as well.

Keywords: *Enhancing, Readability, Potentials, Literature in English.*

i. Reading: Its Conceptualization

Reading is the ability to identify and interpret written symbols correctly. It is also the ability to obtain meaning from words. Reading is a unique human activity that is characterized by the translation of symbols or letters into words and sentences that communicate information and mean something to the reader.

Ogbonna (2014) states that reading literarily refers to the ability to recognize and understand characters or speak word that may printed or written on paper and other formats of recording human knowledge.

Burhan (2012:9) sees reading as a physical and mental activity that reveals the meaning of written texts. In the activity, there is a process of knowing letters.

The place of reading and learning in educational development is a prominent one. Reading facilitates and deepens then learning activities and effective learning results in a way of requiring. Oyeiyemi (2005) observed that reading is a means of tapping knowledge from superior minds.

Reading is a term used refers to an interaction by which meaning encoded in visual stimuli by an author makes meaning in the mind of the reader. It involves the recognition of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for the recall or meaning through the intellectual manipulation of concepts already possessed by reading. Education exposes the learners to reading skills as reading is essential to literacy and it is an emancipatory tool that liberates one from ignorance, disease and poverty.

Reading is the foundation of literacy and in like manner, reading skill is essential for literacy to be functional, durable and development oriented. Reading underlines all teaching activities in schools as it leads to comprehension. The main goal of reading is the process of comprehending written texts therefore reading is important and indispensable as a reading nation is an informed while a non-reading nation is one with high level of ignorance which spells down for such nation. To Oyeiyemi (2005), present day Nigeria cannot be described as a reading nation because the younger generation of Nigerians which account for larger percentage of the country's total population no longer actively engaged in reading and by extension. This has negatively affected all sectors of the economy.

The main purpose of education is to develop individuals and make them useful to themselves and their immediate environment. This development includes intellectual and emotional development which manifest in the behaviour and mental activities of individuals. It must be reiterated that a child's ability to read and well can make an enormous difference to school performance, career potential and personal success. Serious studies, that is reading is no longer valued, appreciated and rewarded accordingly as students no prefer engaging themselves in activities that have immediate rewards such as singing, rapping and dancing (breaking). All this are not favourable to the educational sector aside national policies that contribute negatively to the growth and development of education in Nigeria. However, access to education which lacks the ability to instill reading interest and potentials in student is just a

waste of time because education is meant to deposit into learners the necessary skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which will make them develops themselves and also empower them so as to affect their society meaningfully and positively. This will also equip them for their life's challenges.

Aside mass failure, lack of sound readability potentials has left the nation with "drop outs" who have become menace to the society, some of them have become notorious criminals while some of them have become thugs or miscreant extorting money from innocent citizens and calling themselves "OmoOnile". A number of them have also become political thugs who carry out the vicious acts of the so called politicians.

Likewise, half- baked graduates further contribute to the collapse of education. If this issue can be addressed in the Junior Secondary Schools, mass failure will be reduced to the bearest minimum in the senior classes thus, emphasis should be laid on reading in the Junior classes because in most public schools, an average student in J. s. s I cannot read fluently in fact, most of them find it difficult to spell their names correctly. Students have to change their attitude toward reading and learning because "a reader is a leader".

Fortune News (2009) and Sandards (2007) says that poor reading culture can be attributed to many factors which include distraction by fall outs from technological innovation in the world such as easy availability of entertainment media, games and gambling. Other factors include adequate funding of educational institutions including funding of libraries, laboratories, workshops and computer units. The list also include poor economy, low standard of living, quest for money by parents who use their children to hawk consumer items, acceptance of examination malpractices, increasing cost of publishing which makes it difficult for school pupils and students to have access to books, magazines, journals and newspapers and lastly, lack of adequate bookshops. Obafemi (2006) opined that poor reading culture among Nigerian students was due to economy that is stagnant, reading is expensive and has become a leisure most people could afford as people now prefer to stay in their homes and watch home videos.

Factors Inhibiting Readability Potentials of Students

- **Lack of Solid Language base or foundation (mother tongue)**

Mother tongue is a great asset people bring to the task of learning foreign language(s) as it provides language acquisition support system. A bilingual or multilingual person successfully understands other languages with the indepth knowledge of his/her mother tongue. A person who is deficient in his/her mother tongue might find it difficult understanding other languages. Mother tongue should be held in high esteem and used in teaching school subjects as well as foreign languages because it is a child's strongest ally therefore, it (mother tongue) is the master key to foreign languages and subjects taught in foreign languages. Mother tongue teaching aids make it easier for teaching foreign languages but it is a pity that children lack solid language base as they do not have indepth knowledge of their mother tongue as this has made it difficult for them to understand foreign language well.

- **Lack of Conducive Environment for Learning**

Most learning environments are not academic and student friendly. Many public schools have dilapidated buildings, leaking roofs, bad chalkboards and chairs, some classes don't even have chairs, chalkboard and windows yet learning takes place there. Also, many schools are over-populated so much that over fifty students will be choked up in a small classroom, this encourages truancy as students see no reason in coming to school to get punished standing all through the day or sharing a chair with two other students hence, this reduces the readability potentials of students therefore, government has to put in place better structures which are conducive for learning.

- **Lack of Motivation and Interest**

Motivation is a means of pacifying students to do more academically. Interests of students have been redirected from reading because they have not been adequately rewarded and motivated by either the teachers, parents and the society. During teaching and learning, teachers are expected to ask questions from students to ascertain their level of understanding; correct answers given by students are usually rewarded with claps but teachers can also reward the effort of their students by giving out notebooks or even textbooks as this will gear others to read and study harder. Schools can also introduce intra-school debate, quiz and essay competition where the participants and winner will be lavished with gifts as this will gear the participants to do more and other students might become envious and settle down for serious reading so as to receive gifts too. Once this is being done, students will improve on their reading habits. On the part of parents, they are expected not to castigate their wards for performing woefully rather, they should encourage them ad motivate the children appropriately whenever they perform well. Parents can also help in developing the readability potentials of their children by providing them with educative books, videos and educative games. Government should make provision for scholarships given to students whose performance are far above expectation likewise, employment opportunities should be made available to youths as this will encourage the younger ones to take education serious.

- **Poverty**

Many Nigerians can hardly afford three square meal a day not to talk of buying books for their children and some parents have resorted to sending their children to the street to get money through hawking of consumer goods, pick pocketing and stealing. All these do not give room for students to have good time to study because all they are after is getting money to feed. Poverty has led many children to look for quick money, they prefer engaging in gambling and more profitable ventures rather than reading; many students in secondary schools from bands of singers, rappers and dancers rather than coming together to form group of readers, writers or poets. If poverty can be eradicated in our nation, undoubtedly, students will possess sound readability potential. Lawal (2005) posited that presently in Nigeria, material wealth is valued more than knowledge and education. This is true because a wealthy illiterate is accorded more respect and recognition in our society than a poor or unemployed graduate.

- **Corruption and Ignorance on the Value of Education**

Corruption is a cankerworm that has infested all sectors of the Nigerian economy. Corruption is the outcome of poverty, it occurs at all levels of the society as it undermines political and economic development. Corruption destroys the mind of the young ones and siphons the moral values of our society, students are ill mannered, parents struggle hard to help their children get grades and certificates which they do not merit, teachers and lecturers take bribe and examination papers leak before exams. Instances of corruption in Nigerian education sector include students who bribe teachers either in cash or kind just to be rewarded with grades and marks which they don't merit. This is drastically affecting the nation as many students prefer to indulge in immoral act rather than face their studies diligently, they trade sex for grades and certificates, they cheat in examination halls.

Most secondary school students are familiar with all cheating styles such as bringing in chips called 'expos' or 'micro tintin', writing answers on the laps, palm and on their desks. Odukuye (2008) asserted that examination malpractices can be conceptualized as a dishonest way of trying to achieve a good result". He said noticeable traces of academic corruption are;

1. Students spending time trying to copy formular, definitions and subject content on materials.
2. Students trying to pre-determine where to set during examination.
3. Students become extra careful and kind to those ones who can render assistance during exam.
4. Students becoming restless during exam; looking sideways and behind for any kind of help.
5. Students trying to entice invigilators and examiners.

Queensoap (2006) established examination malpractices as "a form of academic corruption which entails the act of deviation by students from formal rules that regulate their behaviours in the secondary education system". According to Ajala (2010), the various forms of examination malpractices include alteration of scores by examining board computer operators, bringing worked answers to examination hall, mass/organized cheating involving assistance from invigilators, supervisors and outsiders. Adehoke (2010) sees that our nation is a fertile platform where academic corruption thrives due to lack of proper social value system and high premium placed or attached to paper qualification as pre-requisite for admission and gainful employment.

Conclusively, it should be known that teachers who mark based on favouritism and bribe, parents, examination supervisors, school principals and even examination bodies who leak out their questions having received bribe are known contributors to academic corruption and this is not helping the nation, it is killing the lives of Nigerian students as well as the nation as students now see reading as a waste of time.

- **Inadequate Facilities and Teaching Aids**

Most schools have inadequately furnished libraries, laboratories and necessary facilities which facilitate learning as students are not familiar with practical aspects of their subjects. Libraries play important role in the promotion of reading but most schools have poor libraries; libraries help children and youths develop critical and independent thinking through exposure to a wide variety of instructional resources and learning opportunities. Libraries develop readers value and attitude hence, government should fund school libraries which should be equipped with relevant, current materials and instructional packages. Douglas (2008) says the library becomes increasingly important in teaching, not only in supply of materials but also in provision of books, pictures, pamphlets, maps, filmstrips, recording and all other printed media which makes it a gold mine for each teacher and student. Ogwu (2006) highlights the various ways by which libraries can be used as a platform for entrenching reading culture. The first point is the fact that libraries have variety of learning resources such as books, computer e.t.c. Secondly, it offers a conducive atmosphere and silence which makes it conducive for reading, the third point is that libraries offer cheaper access to information, the fourth is that information is easily discovered through cataloguing and classification which is appropriately done. Finally, library offers readers the services of professionals and experts meeting their information needs.

- **Exposure to Internet Facilities and Video Tapes**

Social media are meant to play complementing roles to reading as it is a forum to sources of information which are meaningful but this is serving as distraction to students thus reducing their readability potentials because students are wrongly exposed to the use of internet and mobile phones. Students concentrate on phone calls and chats while in class and spend important hours of their time chatting and surfing the net for pornographic pictures and videos. Instead of sourcing for vital information online, some youths prefer going for online scam and cyber frauds called yahoo yahoo and yahoo plus thus killing their readability potential. Rather than reading, female students also prefer going to online prostitution and chatting with men. Home videos also kill readability potentials of students as they spend maximum time in front of television watching season films which do not educate them in any manner. All these contribute to the reading deficiency of students and makes them unproductive in the society.

ii. Effect of Poor Readability Potential

Okoh (2010) observed that the education system in the country is in a pitiable state and lamented on the product of educational system which are early sex thought and immoral habits, corruption, cultism, examination malpractice and dubious strategies.

Maxwell (2013) discovered that students grade do not have correlation with intellectual ability of students. This shows the level of compromise of our academic institutions.

Fosudo (2010) observed that children with poor reading habits have higher chance of engaging in antisocial behaviour and delinquency such as school violence, bullying, hacking computers etc. He further explained that poor reading skill can make a child develop poor attitude towards school and create self-esteem problem later in life.

According to Ojugo (2005), the World Bank in conjunction with the Nigerian institute for social and economic research in 2001 produced a report which confirmed the fears of educators, parents, employers and the general public about the degeneration of the country's education. The report revealed that the average graduate who leaves school with a degree certificate is not worth the qualification as Nigerian graduates lack technical skills, have poor command of English and are largely unemployable. By and large, lack of sound readability potential has led to high failure rate in examinations, increase in student dropout rate, production of half-baked graduates who cannot write their names correctly talk less of expressing themselves, increase in crime rate such as robbery, scams and cyber frauds, misplaced priorities such as increase in cultism, prostitution and other forms of immoralities and finally, educational, social, political and economic setbacks.

The lack of sound readability potential by youths who are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow has made them unfit for social responsibilities. Economically, the nation is suffering because there are no qualified manpower who can contribute positively, vibrant and intelligent electorates who can participate in governance are found wanting. Poor readability potential has no positive impact on the students themselves and the economy of the nation and this has to be corrected.

Determining factors of Students' Readability Potentials

Reading potentials can be assessed or measured through the following:

- Level of understanding and comprehension
- Phonological awareness
- Reading accuracy
- Word identification
- Reading fluency
- Reading speed

1. **Level of Understanding and Comprehension:** This is the most common reading assessment as it involves students reading a given passage and asked detailed questions about the content of the text. Inferential questions can be asked, students can be required to identify and summarize the main idea of the text. So also, 'cloze' can be used that is, omitting words from a passage and expecting students to provide appropriate word(s) that fills the blank. This is done to ascertain student's level of comprehension of a given passage.
2. **Reading Accuracy:** Here, students are asked to read a passage clearly and correctly as possible without making mistakes. This is sometimes called 'running record' as students read aloud, this makes it possible for teachers to note student's mistake(s) and make corrections where necessary.
3. **Phonological Awareness:** Students should be able to discriminate between two similar words for instance, 'floor' and 'flaw', 'cot and court, word and world' This type of assessment measures how students produce sounds and pronounce words correctly paying attention to vowel and consonant sounds. Attention here is placed on word pronunciation, not meaning.
4. **World Identification:** Students are expected to be familiar with certain words and registers. Meaning of words should also be deduced contextually. Therefore, this measures the level of vocabulary students have in their repertoire and this can be known through word list and match making. Students can be asked to read aloud certain word lists, they may be asked to match pairs of words that have the same sound, they may also be asked to match synonyms and antonyms.
5. **Reading Fluency:** This is the ability to read naturally and effortlessly through sound linguistic knowledge which encompasses phonemic awareness, syntactic knowledge and phonological awareness.
6. **Reading Speed:** Rate of reading determines students proficiency and level of readability potential. Average reading speed is 240-300 words per minute and to achieve this, students are not expected to increase the speed of their eye across the page rather, they should increase the number of words the eyes recognize in a single fixation. To determine the reading speed of students, students can be given a comprehension passage or text within a specific time frame or timed, reading is an indispensable tool for learning in various hierarchies of modern educational setup which helps facilitates learning process and effectively promote intellectual development in learning. Sanders (2007) says reading enables creativity to blossom in a child.

Benefits of Reading to Academic Performance of Students

Clark and Rumbold (2006) says reading has many functions in student's everyday life. Lee (2006) lists five (5) benefits of reading which are:

- a. Reading evokes curiosity and sensibility
- b. Reading helps the reader build good view points and enhances personality

- c. Reading broadens reader's experience and strengthen the willingness to heads realize ones goals.
- d. Reading makes the reader explore information and use it to create knowledge and finally,
- e. Reading has therapeutic value.

Divya (2008) and Isaac (2007) also list the following as the benefits of reading:

- a. Reading is an active mental process which makes one think more and become smarter, it engages the brain in active and reasonable activity unlike televisions.
- b. It is a fundamental skill builder. Every good course on the planet has a matching book to go with it.
- c. Improves vocabulary while reading books, especially challenging ones, it exposes one to many new words.
- d. It gives a glimpse into other culture and places-book can expand one's horizons by letting one see what other cities and countries have to offer before visiting them.
- e. Improves concentration and focus-reading books take bring power. It requires a person to focus on what he is reading for long periods.
- f. Builds self-esteem-reading helps an individual become better informed and more of an expert or the topic read. This expertise translates into higher self-esteem.
- g. Improves memory-reading although not a game, helps to sketch memory muscle as reading requires details, facts and figures.
- h. Improves discipline to add book reading to a person's daily schedule and sticking to it improves discipline.
- i. Improves creativity-by reading more books and being exposed to new and more complete information, one's creative idea is enhanced.
- j. Gives something to talk about-reading a lot of books equips one with the ability to make contribution during discussions.
- k. Easy to learn at ones own pace-reading helps one to learn at his own pace.
- l. Improves reasoning skills-reading builds the way people reason, it makes people reason more better and wider.
- m. Builds expertise-reading many books on a subject for a longtime makes a person an authority in that subject area.
- n. Decreases mistakes-when the deep and wide wisdom that books can provide is utilized, the tendency to make mistake is reduced.
- o. Discovery of surprises-reading more books as a source of information enhances learning things that were not looked for, since so many subjects intertwine, it is almost impossible not to learn something other than the book's subject.
- p. Decrease boredom-one the ways of eliminating boredom is to pick up a book and read one's interest in the book's subject will make a difference.
- q. Reading changes life-it opens one's eyes to new ways of thinking. It helps to choose a life pattern and set the reader free from old habitual thought patterns.
- r. Reduces stress-reading some comics can get one relieved from stress, many people also unwind by reading. Picking up a book after work reduces stress.
- s. Gets you away from digital distraction-spending more time reading good books makes a reader have less time for the plethora of digital gadgets begging for attention.
- t. Improves writing skills-reading does not only improve ones' vocabulary and critical thinking, it makes one a better writer especially when surrounded with books written by those better than him. Regular reading no doubt improves writing skills.

Reading is important as it gives way for personal opportunities and success. Reading is engaged in to gain experience, more knowledge, occupy oneself, obtain pleasure and gain language competence. There are diverse reasons for reading and for whatever reason it may be, sound reading must be encouraged and maintained for the attainment of success and all round national development and growth.

Solution to the Problem of Poor Readability Potentials among Students

- 1) Provision of conducive environment for learning.
- 2) Motivation and interest of students should be sustained through introduction of captivating literary tents and excellent performance of students should be rewarded.
- 3) Value of education should be reiterated and made known to students.
- 4) Adequate facilities and teaching aids should be made available to students.

Furthermore, Esther Lonbard (2012) rightly observes that literature exposes us to a new world of experience because of its universal nature, it touches every aspect of human life. It can be said that functional goal of literature is to inform, educate and entertain. Literature has three genres which are: drama, prose and poetry and through each genre, students are adequately informed, while entertaining, literature has educative and pedagogic function.

However, literature plays significant role in nation development as it is an instrument for the awakening of human consciousness to a better understanding of the world around us and our roles therein. Other functions of literature are as follows;

- 1) Literature entertains, educates and informs.
- 2) It teaches moral by instilling the right type of behaviour and attitude in individuals.
- 3) It is a presentation of our culture and the culture of others and with this, we understand our culture and that of others better.
- 4) It is an instrument for social control.
- 5) It is a means of exposure
- 6) Literature is a tool for the improvement of language skills
- 7) It develops thinking skills
- 8) Literature widen the scope and horizon of individuals
- 9) It improves ones reading ability

What is Literature?

The term literature eludes a simple explanation and definition. Hence, several scholars have come up with different definition thus making literature to be a victim of pluralism. Literature, in its broadest sense is any written work. Etymologically, literature is derived from Latin “Litaritura/litteratura” writing formal with letters (Kelly, 2015). Literature is a form of human expression both in an oral and written form (Britannica Dictionary). Literature user artistic expression hence refers to written works, such as novels short stories, biographies, memories, essays and movies. Literature is a mirror of human society and an imaginary work of arts. Literature deals with human life by using of the writers’ imagination to shed light on the sides that cannot be recognize by the scientists. Literature deals with human life in general.

Literature can be fictional and non-fictional. Fiction refers to literature created from imagination, such as mysteries, science fiction, romance, fantasy, chick lit, crime thrillers etc. fictional literature is a function of mental imagination. Non-fictional literature is a literature that contains stories that are true to human experiences and realities in life (Kelly, 2015). The genres or branches of literature are:

- Drama
- Prose and
- Poetry

Functions of Literature

Summarily, the following are functions of literature According to Simwa (2020)

- Literature enriches one’ s knowledge about the world
- It makes communication with other people to be possible
- Literature entertains and brings amuzement
- Literature brings self-development in terms vocabulary
- Literature shaping speech

Nyadzi (2019) says that literature has the following functions.

- Literature develops one’ s language learning and usages
- Literature teaches valuable lessons about human nature
- Literature has a moral effect on society
- Literature improves and enriches our use of language
- Literature inspires, and so on.

Conclusion

Literature in English is an important ways through which reading culture, habit and students' ability to decode graphic symbols of sounds (reading) can be developed and boosted. Also, that students' fluency and master of words spelling, pronunciation etc could be developed.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that;

- 1) Literature in English teachers should adopt both formal and informal approach in their quest for improved teaching and learning of literature in English in Nigeria.
- 2) School managements should make school literacy activities more effective to enable them serve as tool for teaching and learning of literature in English. Such activities include reading competition, debate, quiz, spelling bees e.t.c
- 3) Education policy makers as well as curriculum planners should create more period for teaching reading skills in Secondary School time table.
- 4) Libraries should be adequately furnished by Government and school authorities as library aids literacy development through libraries, students enjoy reading and using of library resources/materials develops critical thinking and life-long learning skills in students.
- 5) Teacher' s involvement must be adequately appreciated and rewarded as teachers are in best position to recommend useful reading materials to students as well as motivate and encourage students to read wide.
- 6) Parent involvement is paramount to addressing literacy problems of children hence, parents should provide appropriate reading materials, controlling television viewing and wrong access to mobile phones and internet.
- 7) An up to date and regular seminar and workshop should be organized for teachers on reading and importance of literature so that they can devise strategies and ways to enhance student' s readability potentials through literature in English.

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