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## AN ASSESSMENT OF READING AS A LANGUAGE SKILL

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### **Abstract**

The reading demands of university study are not easy. Unfortunately, however, it is all too common for students to pay little attention to their own approaches to reading, that is, how they read, and how they can improve the effectiveness and speed of their reading. This article focuses on reading as one of the language skills. It takes a look at what reading is all about and types of reading. It further discusses levels of reading and reading problems. In order to help students master the art of reading, the work further examines different reading techniques and strategies.

**Keywords:** Reading, Language Skill

### **Introduction**

Reading is one of the language skills students at every level of learning are expected to develop. Other language skills are writing, speaking and listening. Reading and listening are receptive skills, while writing and speaking are productive skills. It is generally believed that we can only produce or give out what we have received or understood. This assertion makes reading an important language skill that needs to be examined thoroughly. It is also a general belief that many learners perceive reading as a difficult task, while a few enjoy it.

What then is reading? Literally, reading simply means a conscious effort made to understand what is written. In other words, when we read there is an underlying desire to decode written texts. That is why we, more often than not, get frustrated or discouraged when the texts we are reading are not making sense. It is also important to emphasize that reading literally does not only refer to an attempt to decode written text, but also include an attempt to understand symbols, signs graphics, paintings etc. (Aliyu, 2006)

Technically, Sir Richard Steele in C.I Njoke's book chapter on reading defines reading as a healthy means of exercising the human mind. This definition presupposes that human mind needs to be developed and it is through reading that human beings acquire knowledge in order to function very well in society. The brain of a baby is more or less empty at birth, but through reading as a cognitive process, the mind is informed and developed to fit in perfectly in the society. That is why we must appreciate the establishment of schools as it has enhanced greatly the reading ability of humans.

Reading as a complex cognitive process of acquiring knowledge or information is predicated on three important factors: the written texts/symbols (the writer), the reader and the reader's background knowledge and experience (in relation to what is written). These three factors are absolutely necessary in any communicative and cognitive process. In other words, a written text must be available, the reader must have the desire to acquire knowledge and the reader's background knowledge in relation to the text will stimulate the interest in what is being read. Reading as earlier identified is one of the language skills learners must develop if such learners aspire to go far in their educational pursuit. In line with this assertion, reading must be a continuous process and the interest or desire to read must be sustained. Reading should not be a one- of adventure. At every stage in life, we need knowledge and information in order to be relevant and contribute our quota in the development of our immediate society and the world at large.(Uno, 1968)

### **Types of Reading**

Generally speaking, reading can be done in two ways: **orally and silently**. In other words, we may read books or articles aloud to the hearing of people around or in our minds without our voices being heard. Hence, two types of reading have been identified: **oral and silent**.

#### **Oral Reading**

Oral as a word is related to the mouth. It also explains that which is spoken rather than written. In oral reading, the reader reads out to the hearing of people around that which is written. The main target of oral reading is to inform, educate and entertain listeners, hearers or an audience. The reader while reading aloud ensures that he/she establishes and maintains the tripartite communication relationship that exists among him/her, the writer and the listeners/audience. He/she must ensure that the message of the writer is well communicated to the listeners/audience.

Oral reading takes the form of public speeches such as valedictory, speech, welcome address, keynote address, news broadcast, public announcements, conference papers, minutes of meetings, matriculation speech, inaugural lecture, address by the President, Governor, Minister, Commissioner, etc., speeches at union or party rallies or ceremonies, etc. (Ogbodo,2015)

#### **Silent Reading**

To be silent means not to talk or to be quiet. Thus, silent reading explains the act of reading books, articles or any text without being heard by people around. In this case, our minds or brains do the reading and at the same time interpret what we are reading.

Silent reading is divided into four types: **Skimming, Scanning, Intensive and Extensive**.

**Skimming** involves reading through a piece of writing quickly in order to get general information or have an idea of what the piece of writing is all about. In skimming, the reader targets main ideas in a text and quickly notes them. Little time is spent in this type of reading.

In **Scanning**, the reader reads for specific information in a text. The reader knows what he or she is looking for in a text and consciously flips through the pages of a text for such. The reader quickly and carefully reads the pages that contain the information he or she is looking for and makes notes. As in the case of skimming, scanning for specific information in a text does not take time.

**Intensive** reading is simply described as an extension of skimming and scanning. What this means is that in intensive reading, the reader goes beyond the point of trying to know the

main ideas or specific information in a text. The reader reads in order to grasp the details of a text. There is an effort in intensive reading to read in between lines in order to comprehend the full message of the writer. The reader carefully examines the topics and sub-topics discussed in a text and determine the relationship that exists among them. He also considers the linguistic implications of a text and determines its similarity or otherwise with other texts in the issues discussed. A reader who is preparing for an examination or test can adopt intensive reading.

**Extensive** reading can also be said to be an extension of intensive reading. Unlike in intensive reading where one, two or three texts are read for specific purpose, extensive reading requires reading of large quantities of texts. The materials or texts read are on a range of topics. The main reason for this type of reading is for pleasure, information and general knowledge. A student writing a project, dissertation or thesis may engage in extensive reading before settling down to intensive reading. (Schneider, 2015)

### **Levels of Reading**

When we read books, articles or materials, we usually have an aim, a target or focus. Such aims or targets and abilities form the basis for arranging people according to their experiences in reading. Levels of reading can be referred to as close reading. Close reading is a special kind of analytical (logical) reasoning in which readers when reading, slow down and think about each word, detail or image of the text. ([http://www. Slideshare.net/levels of reading](http://www.Slideshare.net/levels_of_reading)).

Some schools of thought have categorized levels of reading into three, while others classified them into four. Here we will examine four levels of reading: **Literal or Elementary, Inferential or Inspectional, Analytical or Evaluative and Synthetical.**

#### **Literal or Elementary Level**

Literal or elementary level of reading is simply reading to understand the basic sense or meaning of a text. At this level of reading, the reader's aim or focus is to find meaning directly in a text. In other words, the reader does not engage in any sophisticated means of understanding the text or making meaning out of it. Meaning at this level is surface and not deep as the reader is only conscious of simple and direct issues raised in the text. There is no attempt at this level by the reader to consider detailed matters of the text, but only the simple issues are meaning quickly made out of. Most importantly, reading at this level does not consume much time as the reader reads as fast as possible in order to grasp the basic meaning of the text. Questions that begin with what, who, when and where are answered in the text. (Ogbodo, 2015)

#### **Consider this**

Who killed Chief Okeke?

#### **Answer**

Some Robbers

#### **The Inferential or Inspectional Level**

This is a kind of mindful reading in which the reader considers the implied meaning of a text rather than only its surface meaning. Reading at this level is selective and the reader applies different skills of reading. He or she reads in between lines in order to comprehend the connotative meanings of words and expressions in the text. Also at this level, the reader interprets what is in the text by reasoning, comparing, contrasting, classifying and analyzing. The most important thing to note about this kind of reading is that the exact answers to the

questions asked are not found directly in the text. As noted earlier, the reader must read in between lines to discover the answers.

**Consider this**

How did Chief Okeke become wealthy?

**Answer**

He became wealthy through contracts and investments

**Analytical or Evaluative Level**

Analytical way of doing something means the use of logical reasoning while evaluative implies an assessment of the values, qualities and significance of a particular person or thing. Hence in analytical or evaluative level of reading, the reader goes beyond literal or inferential meaning to critical and abstract thinking in order to grasp fully the message or information in a text. At this level of reading, there is a higher degree of attentiveness to the details, structure and message of the text. In analytical reading, the reader more or less evaluates how well the authors' ideas and insights are in relation to the readers understanding or comprehension of the text. As a critic and evaluator, the reader at this level of reading can illustrate, discuss, comment and analyze issues raised in the text. Questions at this level of reading usually begin with evaluate, compare and contrast, classify, discuss, comment, illustrate, explain etc.

**Consider this**

In your own words, explain the circumstances that led to the death of Chief Okeke.

**The Synthetical Level**

This is the highest level of reading where the reader's thought, ideas, background knowledge and the information contained in a text come into play. At this level, the reader is in no longer interested in literal or inferential meaning nor interested in critically analysing or evaluating issues raised in the text, but reads in order to form his or her own opinion on the matters discussed in the text. What this means is that at this level, the reader focuses or aims at developing his or her thoughts, ideas and hypothesis in relation to the issues captured by the author in the text. He or she at this level of reading is seen as a theorist, policy formulator and a researcher.

**Consider this**

Establish other factors that could lead to the killing of wealthy men like chief Okeke.

**Reading Problems**

Reading problems are those factors that hinder or affect our reading abilities. They serve as clog in the wheel of progress of reading. Some of the reading problems readers face is **linguistic, psychological or emotional, environmental, dyslexia, vocalization, head and other body parts movement and regression.**

**Linguistic Problem**

As the name implies, linguistic problem relates to the deficiency in articulating & comprehending sounds (phonology) and written words (orthographic) of a given language. Students or readers at early age may find it difficult to articulate and comprehend sounds and written words of a given language. If the problem is not corrected at this stage of development it will definitely affect the reading ability of the learners or students.(Clark-Edmands, 2004)

### **Environmental Problem**

Reading in a noise or uncondusive environment adversely affects or hinders purposeful reading. It is very difficult to understand or comprehend what one is reading in a noise, dirty or uncondusive environment. Most readers or students that read in such an uncondusive environment find it difficult to concentrate and such can discourage reading greatly.

### **Dyslexia**

This is defined as a learning disability in a person in which the person finds it difficult to read and write. Readers that have dyslexia find it difficult to comprehend what they are reading because they cannot easily recognized words, their spellings and meanings. Since dyslexia has been proved to be a neurological disposition, the general belief that it is caused by poor teaching should be discarded. Thus, a person that has dyslexia can overcome it and become good reader and writer if properly supported.

### **Psychological, Emotional and Physiological Problem**

When a reader is emotionally, psychologically or physiologically unstable, it slows down reading. In other words, stress, anxiety, fear, anger, negative feelings, tiredness, hunger, etc can immensely affect reading. Hence, readers are advised to try as much as possible not to allow any psychological, emotional or physiological problem to slow down their reading ability and comprehension. That is why reading with a purpose or target is greatly encouraged.

### **Vocalization**

To vocalize means to express with the voice or to utter or say something. Some readers have formed the habit of uttering what they are reading. This practice slows down reading and comprehension. Uttering what is read can affect other readers that enjoy reading in a quiet environment. Readers are therefore advised to master the act of reading with their minds in order to read faster and comprehend better.

### **Head and Other Body Parts Movement**

The bad habit of moving one's head and other body parts like legs, hands, etc. while reading slows down reading and comprehension. Readers and students are encouraged to try as much as possible to be still when reading as it brings about the much needed concentration and focus.

### **Regression**

Many readers find it difficult to read books or articles straight without going back to what they have read. There is this belief that what they have read previously was not understood or clear, hence would like to read is again before reading further. This practice more often than not slows down reading speed and comprehension. It further leads to unnecessary anxiety, distraction, lack of concentration and confidence. Readers are advised to see a text as that which contains holistic information. Thus, understanding of a text does not depend on the previously read pages. Meaning of a given text is achieved as the text is read from one page to the other.

### **Reading Techniques and Strategies**

As already noted in the introduction, reading is perceived by many as a difficult task. Notwithstanding the problems associated with reading, some techniques and strategies of reading if well applied can make reading a worthwhile venture. They include **reading with a**

**target or purpose, scanning, skimming, active reading, detailed reading, speed reading, note-taking and the SQ3R.**

### **Target or Purposeful Reading**

This in every sense is the first technique/strategy for an effective reading. Any reading that does not have a target or purpose may end up in futurity. That is why every student or reader should as a matter of utmost importance set for him or herself the goal to achieve when reading a text. The purpose may be to understand a text in order to answer questions, pass an examination, teach or write an article.

### **Scanning and Skimming**

These have been explained in this chapter. They are powerful techniques every reader should make use of so as to make reading an exciting experience.

### **Active Reading**

The reason for reading failure many readers experience is surface reading. Active reading is a kind of in depth or deep level reading that enables the reader to understand a given text. The reader applying this strategy thinks as he reads the text for full comprehension. (Clark-Edmands, 2004)

### **Detailed Reading**

This is an extension of active reading. The reader considers every word used in the text in order to get accurate information from the text. Detailed reading also enhances or aids full understanding of a text.

### **Speed Reading**

Although it is important to emphasize that there are slow and fast readers, the truth is that slow reading can lead to reading failure. Thus, every reader should adopt speed reading technique in order to increase his or her reading speed. A situation where a reader reads a text for weeks may hinder further reading as he or she sees reading as a boring experience. It is also important to note that speed reading should not replace full comprehension of a text. The two should be applied in any text read. (Ogbodo, 1996)

### **Note-Taking**

This simply means putting or jotting down some relevant points while reading a text. Its aim is to enable readers recall what they have read without going back to the text. As already noted, only important points should be jotted in order not to make the note voluminous. (Calpoly, 2017)

### **The SQ3R**

It is generally believed that many students or learners tend to forget most of the things they read over a period of time. Hence the SQ3R technique of reading enables the reader to retain and recall as much as possible what he or she has read. “**S**” stands for **survey**, “**Q**” represents **question**, while the “**3R**” stand for **read, recall and review**.

**Surveying** the text enables the reader to have general information of a text such as its title, subject, topics and sub-topics discussed, table of contents, publication details, etc. This obviously will enable the reader to determine his or her purpose of reading a text. Surveying a text is immediately followed by **question**. The reader asks basic questions in line with the text. Such questions could be how relevant is the text to his or her reading purpose? Did the author discuss in detail the subject of the text? The reader after asking some questions begins to **read, recall and review** the text. He or she reads the text carefully in order to understand

it. In recall, he or she commits to memory what he is reading, while in review the reader establishes the main ideas and relevant details of the text.

### **Revision Questions**

1. Briefly explain reading as one of the language skills.
2. Identify and explain two types of reading.
3. Discuss different levels of reading.
4. What do you understand by techniques or strategies of reading?
5. Identify and explain briefly various techniques or strategies of reading.

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