

LEXICAL AND CULTURAL INDICES INTO THE READABILITY LEVEL OF EVANS MODULAR ENGLISH COURSE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS 6

OLATAYO OLUSOLA FIDELIS

Department of General Studies,
School of Education,
College of Education, Lanlate , Oyo State,
Nigeria.

ALABI, SAMSON ADEMOLA

Department of General Studies,
School of Education,
College of Education, Lanlate, Oyo State,
Nigeria.

Alabisamsonademola@Gmail.Com

Abstract

This study examined the suitability of Evans English course for primary schools 6 in terms of how readable are the comprehension passages there. Three readability indices like lexical density, culture load and age grade were employed to find the fact. The study found out that: the lexical density of the text is extremely low; the contents of the passages are not culturally rooted but the chronological age of the target group matches the content of the passages. It was also found out that the readability of the text is at independent level. It was suggested that authors of Evans Modular English course for Primary Schools 6 should include, in future edition, culture-based passages and teachers using the text should provide the necessary guides for the pupils to ensure hundred percent comprehensions, because most of these pupils have poor background of English Language.

INTRODUCTION

English Language has gone beyond mere legacy left by the colonial masters. It has become a leading language in the nation (Olatayo 2011). This is one of the reason why Bamigbose (1971) cited in Olatayo (2012) asserted that of all the heritages left behind by the British at the end of the colonial administration probably none is more important than English Language. Omole (2008) equally shared the same view when he stated that ‘English is not just a second language to many Nigerians but also an official language of the entire country with all its educational, technological, legislative and diplomatic functions and efficiency.’

In the same vein, Ajulo (1989) equally opines that:

The role of English Language in
A mult-lingual and mult-cultural
Country as Nigeria has been one of
integration. Infact, it has been
claimed for English Language that
it is a means of homogenizing the
ethnically and culturally diverse Nigerian people.

All the above assertions and numerous similar others are pointing to the fact that English Language is paramount to any meaningful social economic, political, educational, legislative and technological developments in the nation. This being so, no stone should be left unturned to ensure that the Language is well developed and effectively used in Nigeria. Unfortunately, from all indications, all is not well with the development of the language in Nigeria as evident in the quality of usage either in oral or written form. And the trend is greatly affecting the entire educational system of the nation.

To reposition Nigerian education system, something drastic needs to be done to minimize all the problems responsible for the ineffective use of the language most especially among Nigerian students. There is need for joint efforts towards identification of the problems, the causes of such problems and how the problem could be removed.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As important as English Language is to the existence of Nigeria as a nation, all the available linguistic indices are pointing to the gradual decline in the standard and quality of English Language in use in the country (Olatayo 2012). And if one considers the relevance and importance of English to Nigerian socio-political and economic situations, such prevailing sub-standard quality of English should call for concern (Olatayo 2012).

One major factor that is responsible for lack of sound knowledge and proper use of the language is poor reading skills and habits that resulted into poor comprehension of material produced in the language. As asserted by Okwulagwe (1998) thousands of Nigerians students have various reading problems and these problems exist at different levels of education. And definitely, these problems are partly responsible for the mass failure of students in both internal and external examinations and at the same time contributing to the systematic falling in the standard of education in Nigeria.

Many factors could be held responsible for reading problems among Nigerian students. One of them is the suitability or otherwise of the textbooks recommended for the students. Most of the textbook writers hardly take cognizance of the interest and the linguistic background of their target readers hence some of the texts constitute comprehension problems to the readers. The above fact induces one to think of examining most of those texts as sources of reading problems to students. And since all the texts cannot be examined at once one would need to examine them one by one.

The focus of this study therefore is the *Evans Modular English course for primary schools 6* and the research problems in the study centre round these questions.

- i. Are the comprehension passages in the Evans Modula English course for Primary 6 lexically dense for the groups of students they meant for?
- ii. Are the contents of such passages culturally loaded?
- iii. Are the comprehension passages suitable for that group of students?
- iv. What is the readability level of the text?

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In Nigeria of today, there are books and there are books. In fact, textbooks have flooded Nigerians markets but most of these books are written without taking the interest of the users into consideration. The books are produced purely for financial gains. To guide the innocent students against miseducation and learning problems that the use of bad textbooks can cause, there is need for critical evaluation of any textbook that would be recommended for use in our schools.

The purpose of this study therefore, is to critically evaluate the *Evans Modular English course for primary 6* and determine its appropriateness for the group of student it was recommended by:

- i. Determining the level of lexical density of the text.
- ii. Finding out how cultural loaded are the content of the comprehension passages in the text.
- iii. Determining its level of readability.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this section is to briefly examine some views and opinions of scholars about the concept of reading and readability as documented through various means.

According to Akinwumi (2004:19) ‘reading determines the quality of learners’ output in terms of performance and competence’. This view sees reading as vital tools of the readers life achievements. In the same vein, Sybil (1984) cited in Akinwumi (2004:20) regarded reading ‘as the process of communication through which most formal learning takes place. It involves understanding of the written language and responding to the authors message’. With this definition, reading is branded as effective means of acquiring formal education. Similarly, Osoba (1997) quoted by Akinwumi (2004) describes reading as a communication process through which information is passed from the writer to the reader by means of written symbols. It necessarily involves the recognition and understanding of the nature of the linguistic symbols that constitute written language.

From the above definition, it is evident that reading as a concept has much to do with means of getting information from what is written down and getting correct

information from what is read presupposed thorough comprehension of such materials. Effective comprehension on the other hand will depend on how readable is the material involved to the reader. This is where the concept of readability comes in.

Readability according to Arua and Onukaogu (1997) cited in Idowu (2002:26) ‘refers to the difficulty level of reading materials.’ Clare (1963) quoted by Idowu (2002:27) gave two definitions of readability thus: ‘Readability is the probable success a reader will have in reading and understanding a piece of writing.’ According to Idowu (2002), the two definitions put together is comprehensive enough because ‘what brings about difficulty or otherwise of a text is mentioned-style of writing and the ultimate aim of reading a text.’

Jolasinmi (1999) as cited in Idowu (2002) defines ‘readability as the legibility of words. That is, ability to see clearly what is written by hand, typed or printed’. This is grossly inadequate because the essence of reading – understanding or comprehension is relegated to the back ground.

From the above brief discussion, it is evident that reading and readability are closely related. If reading is not going to be for nothing sake, the material to be read must be readable. That is when reading can become a fruitful effort. When the act of reading becomes fruitful, effective reading must have taken place. Hence comprehension in reading presupposes readable materials.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey designed was adopted for the study. Stratified sampling technique was used to select the first paragraph of all the twenty seven (27) reading comprehension passages in the text while purposive sampling technique was used to select passages on which cultural load test was conducted. Also, random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) primary schools out of thirty (30) in Ido Local Government Council of Oyo State and two hundred primary six pupils (Twenty (20) in each school) that served as the subjects of the research.

INSTRUMENTS

The major instruments used in this study were the popularly accepted readability formulae. Three of such formulae were adopted and used as stated below:

LEXICAL DENSITY TEST

The test is based on the established fact that any unfamiliar word will definitely hinder effective comprehension of a given passage.

The first paragraphs of all the twenty seven (27) comprehension passages in the text were copied out and they were given to the subjects to read and underline all the unfamiliar words they could identify in the extracts.

Those lexical items that were underlined by at least fifty percent (50%) of the subjects were regarded as difficult. The total number of such words was used to divide the total number of all the words in the extracts used for the test to determine the lexical density of the text and the same method was used to determine the number of difficult words per sentence.

CULTURAL LOAD TEST

This test is based on the fact that no matter how simple an expression may be, if the content is deeply rooted in a particular culture, readers who are aliens to such culture will find such idea difficult to understand.

For the test, passages that were culture-rooted were purposively selected and written out. Likely lexical and syntactic problems on the extracts were removed through two hour interaction of explanation, questions and answers. Then questions were asked on the meaning of some concepts from the extracts. Questions that were got wrong by at least fifty percent (50%) of the subjects were regarded as having cultural implications.

AGE GRADE TEST

This test is borne out of the belief that each age group and academic grade requires a unique text in terms of lexical contents, sentence structures and sentence length.

This test was conducted on the text using the New Dale-Chall readability formula:

The formula is $0.1579 \left(\frac{\text{difficult word} \times 100}{\text{Total words}} \right) + 0.0496 \left(\frac{\text{Words}}{\text{Sentences}} \right) + 3.6365$

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The comprehension passages in the text form the source of data for the study. The appropriate parts of the passages as identified under methodology were selected and subjected into relevant readability tests. The results of the test were analysed and interpreted using simple percentage. This was adopted to make the findings of study very simple to comprehend for those who would be willing to read the work.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDING

The results of the study are presented in line with the research questions set thus:

Research Question 1: Are the comprehension passages in *Evans English Course for Primary Schools 6* Lexically dense for the 6th grade students it was recommended?

In order to answer this question lexical density test was conducted on the comprehension passages in the text. Twenty seven paragraphs selected as stated in the

methodology were used for the test. The passages altogether contained one hundred and thirty four sentences and one thousand, six hundred and seventy nine words (1,679).

Out of these only twenty words were identified by more than fifty percent (50%) of the subjects as difficult (unfamiliar words). For this reason, the familiar and unfamiliar words in the text exist in ratio 1,679 to 20 which equals to 84 to 1. At sentence level, the ratio is 134 to 20 which equals to 7 to 1. That is, in every eighty four word there is only one difficult or unfamiliar word and in every seven sentence there is only one difficult or unfamiliar word. The information is precisely shown in the table below.

Table Showing Ratio of Difficult Words to Sentence

No. of Sentences	No. of Words	No. of unfamiliar Words	Ratio
134	1,679	20	(i) 84:1 (ii) 7:1

$$\text{i.e. Words} = \frac{20}{1,679} = \frac{1}{84} = \text{Ratio } 84 \text{ to } 1$$

$$\text{Sentence} = \frac{20}{134} = \frac{1}{7} \text{ opp} = \text{Ratio } 7 \text{ to } 1$$

Because there is only one difficult words in every eighty four words and only one word in every seven sentence, the text is not lexically dense. In fact, it is obvious that the lexical contents of the passages are carefully chosen within the range of the target readers (6th grade student's) vocabulary.

Research Question 2: Are the contents in the passages culturally loaded?

To answer this question, culture load test was conducted on the contents of the passages. The only passage that contained elements of culture was copied out. Ten questions demanded that the subjects got a firm grasp of the cultural implication of the content before they could provide answers to the questions drawn.

When the responses of the subjects were scored and analysed, the result showed that one hundred and sixty one (161) out of two hundred subjects got seven (7) and above from the ten (10) questions set on the passage. This that means in their response, about eighty percent (80%) of the subjects scored seventy percent (70%) and above.

Research Question 3: Are the comprehension passages in *Evans Modular English Course for Primary School 6* suitable for the group of students for which it was recommended?

In answering this question, age grade test was conducted on the passages using the New Dale-Chall readability formula. The formula is

$$0.1579 \left(\frac{\text{difficult word} \times 100}{\text{Total words}} \right) + 0.0496 \left(\frac{\text{Words}}{\text{Sentences}} \right) + 3.6365$$

From the sample drawn for the study, one hundred and thirty four sentences containing one thousand, six hundred and seventy nine words were identified. Out of the words, one hundred and eighty one words were found to be out of the list of three thousand (3,000) words identified by Dale-Chall as common words that could be easily understood by an average 4th grade student. Therefore, those words were regarded as difficult words, hence they were used to generate this Data.

$$0.1579 \left(\frac{181}{1679} \times \frac{100}{1} \right) + 0.0496 \left(\frac{1679}{134} \right) + 3.6365$$

$$0.1579 \left(\frac{18100}{1679} \right) + 0.0496 \left(\frac{1679}{134} \right) + 3.6365$$

$$0.1579 (10.7802) + 0.0496 (12.5299) + 3.6365$$

$$1.7022 + 0.6215 + 3.6365 = 5.9602$$

According to Dale-Chall, a score of 5.0 – 5.9 implies that the text could easily be understood by an average 5th or 6th grade student. With this result of 5.9602. Therefore, *Evans Modular English Course for Primary Schools 6* could easily be understood by an average primary six pupil which is the equivalent of grade stipulated in the test.

Likewise if 5 years regarded as ideal school age is added, the result become 11. this means the text could easily be understood by 11 years student who is in 5th or 6th grade. That is, the text is suitable for the 6th grade students in Nigerian public schools.

Research Question 4: What is the readability level of the text?

The answer to this question is provided by considering the results of the three readability tests conducted on the passages in the text. The first test showed that the passages are not lexically dense at all. The vocabulary is chosen within the linguistic experience of the target readers. The second test revealed that the passages are not culturally loaded while the third test indicated that the passages could easily be understood by the 6th grade students that they are meant for.

Based on the above information, it is evident that the degree of comprehension of the passages for an average 6th grade student is above ninety percent (90%). Therefore the readability level of the text is at the independent level.

DISCUSSION

The study was engineered by the fact that the contents of reading materials could hinder effective comprehension if the materials are not carefully selected. In this study therefore, attempts were made to determine the extent to which the comprehension passages in *Evans English Course for Primary Schools Book 6* are readable to its target readers.

Three different types of readability test were conducted on the passages. These are:

- (i) Lexical density test
- (ii) Culture load test
- (iii) Age grade test

The result of the lexical density test revealed that there is only one difficult word in every eighty four word and in seven sentences there is only one difficult word. This showed that the level of the lexical density of the text is extremely low and such could not pose any comprehension problem to the target readers. The lexical items are carefully chosen to suit the linguistic experience of the pupils.

The implication of this revelation is that the teachers using the text should not lay undue emphasis on the treating of the lexical items (difficult words) in the text since they are chosen within the range of the pupils vocabulary.

Another area of the text researched into is the cultural content. The research carried out here showed that the contents of the passages are not culturally loaded. In fact, there is hardly any element of culture in the passages.

For this reason, the teachers using the text need not paying attention to the cultural contents of the text.

Likewise the result of the age group test conducted on the passage showed that the text could be easily understood by an average child of eleven years or above. And since most of the pupils in primary six in Nigeria public primary schools fall within this age range, the text is equally suitable for them. This by implication showed that the text could be used by the target readers with minimum support from their teachers.

CONCLUSION

From the results of the readability tests conducted on the content of the comprehension passages in the text, it has been established that the text is appropriate and suitable for primary six pupils. The text can be independently used effectively by the target readers. The teachers using the text should note that they can use the text for individual and group assignments with ease. They should place least emphasis on

the teaching of the new words (difficult words) since there are only very few of such words in the text. However, they should provide necessary guides that will facilitate higher percent of effectiveness when their pupils are using the text for comprehension.

RECOMMENDATION

Experience from this study showed that the lexical density formula used in this study is highly susceptible to teachers' influence who may want to stage-managed the outcome of the research by assisting the subjects to answer the questions posed to the subjects. Therefore, it is recommended that researcher using the method should endeavor to supervise the subjects of the research personally.

Furthermore, the authors of the Evans Modular English Course for Primary Schools 6 should endeavor to include culture-based passages in their works. That the Book 6 researched into in this paper has just only one passage that is culture-loaded is not good enough. Cultured-based passages, five or six of them in future edition, having contents on our social, communal, political and agrarian way of life; and history of our illustrious and eminent citizens would suffice.

References

- Ajulo A. B. (1989) "The English Language: National language in Mult. Lingual Nigeria". in *Nigeria Journal of policy and strategy* vol. 4 NIPSS Kuro
- Akinwumi, O. T. (2004) "Reading Ability and Creativity and Students Performance in Comprehension Passage". Unpublished M. Ed. Thesis University of Ibadan
- Ayodele S. O, Olafimihan F. S, Isiuge Abanike, I. M (2010) *Evans Modular English Course for primary schools 6*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited
- Chall J. S. and Dale E (1995) *Readability Revisited: The New Dale-Chall Readability Formula*. Cambridge, M. A: Brookline Books
- Idowu, W. J. (2002) :The Readability Level of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* for Senior Secondary II students Reading to Learn Prose in Ibadan". Unpublished M. Ed. Thesis. University of Ibadan.
- Okwilagwe, A. O. (1998). *A New Approach To Reading Comprehension and Summary For Schools and Colleges*. Lagos: Sterling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd. Pp 1.
- Olatayo O.F. (2010) "Reading skills" in Y. Y. Muslim (ed) *Communication skills in English I*. Ibadan: Golden Touch Printing and Publishers Pp 1 - 5
- Olatayo, O. F (2011) "Reading Skills" in Muslim, Y. Y (ed.) *Communication Skills in English I*. Ibadan: Golden Touch Printing and Publishers
- Olatayo O. F. (2012) "Examination Malpractices and The Falling Standard of English Languages: A survey of Secondary Schools Teachers Views in Ibarapa East Local Government Area of Oyo state, Nigeria" in *Nigeria Journal of Languages, Arts, Education and Social Sciences* 3 (1) Abeokuta UEC. Pp 300
- Omole, Kayode (2008) "The Dwindling Standard of English Language: A Challenge to the English Language Teachers" in NJECS vol. 4 Pp 1-8