

ASSESSING CRITICAL ISSUES OF READING FLUENCY FOR ESL STUDENTS AMONG ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract

Reading fluency is a critical component in English language learning. It is however neglected in recent years in view of the dearth of recent literature on reading. The present study seeks to investigate critical issues of reading fluency among ESL adult learners in Nigeria. 50 respondents were selected out of 110 ESL learners from General Studies Programme of Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic Bauchi. Data were collected through questionnaire and Read Aloud Test. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents are not exposed to English phoneme recognition that would guide them to pronounce words appropriately and further read fluently. They are also scared of poor judgment from colleagues, poor foundation and negative perception towards reading. The study suggest for exposure therapy to ameliorate the situation.

Introduction

Fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency depends upon well-developed word recognition skills, but such skills do not inevitably lead to fluency. It is generally acknowledged that fluency is a critical component of skilled reading. Nevertheless, it is often neglected in classroom instruction. That neglect has started to give way as research and theory have re-conceptualized this aspect of reading, and empirical studies have examined the efficacy of specific approaches to teaching fluency.

There is common agreement that fluency develops from reading practice. What researchers have not yet agreed upon is what form such practice should take to be most effective. For example, one approach is to have students read passages orally with guidance and feedback. Programs in this category include repeated reading, neurological impress, paired reading, stared reading, and assisted reading, to note the most popular procedures.

Another, less explicit, but widely used approach, is to encourage students to read extensively on their own or with minimal guidance and feedback. Programs in this category include all efforts to increase the amounts of independent or recreational

reading including sustained silent reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read, Accelerated Reader (AR), and various incentive programs. Often these approaches have no formal name, but take the form of requirements that students engage in unsupervised independent reading at school or home. This examined the evidence concerning the effectiveness of both guided oral reading procedures and approaches that encourage students to read more.

College instructors, even those who teach developmental reading courses, often assume that their students have already mastered basic reading skills such as phonics, word recognition, and fluency (Dietrich, 1994). However, many of these students exhibit insufficient word recognition, limited phonics skills, and laborious reading rates whether or not they have reading disabilities (Bell & Perfetti, 1994; Martino & Hoffman, 2002; Sabatini, 1997). Compared to good college readers, these students read more slowly, decode less accurately, and make more oral reading errors that affect more slowly, decode less accurately, and make more oral reading errors that affect text meaning (Bell & Perfetti, 1994; Sabatini, 2002; Vukovic, Wilson, & Nash, 2004; Warde, 2005).

While developmental reading courses typically teach comprehension strategies and vocabulary, many students still need explicit instruction and practice in developing skills in phonics, word recognition, and fluency (Dietrich, 1994). However, such instruction is rarely incorporated into the college classroom (Dietrich, 1994). This brief provides an overview of research studies describing the difficulties faced by many struggling college readers, as well as studies that identify strategies for improving poor readers' decoding and fluency.

"Reading teachers who work with students at any age level should not assume that their students have an adequate knowledge of phonological structures and orthographic patterns or that they have outgrown their need for this type of instruction" – Kitz & Tarver (1989, p. 204)

Literature Review

Compared to skilled readers, poor college readers make more oral reading errors

that affect the meaning of the text (Bell & Perfetti, 1994); Dietrich, 1994); Martino & Hoffman, 2002; Minus, 1992; Sabatini, 2002; Vukovic, Wilson, & Nash, 2004; Warde, 2005). The relationship between word-level skills and comprehensions is clear; students who either misread or skip unfamiliar words are at risk of failing to accurately comprehend a text. Analyzing the oral reading miscues of 40 university students who had failed a mandatory state reading test, Warde (2005) found that students who had learning disabilities (LD) made many more reading errors than students without LD (27 errors per 100-700 words for LD students compared to 3 errors for non-LD students). More importantly, the errors that LD students made were more likely to change the entire meaning of the text. Such word-level troubles are at the center of many developmental college students' reading problems. In a study of 30 community college students enrolled in developmental reading classes, most of whom were native English speakers, Dietrich (1994) found that the students' average word-analysis skill (i.e. the ability to decode unfamiliar words) was at approximately a 5th-grade equivalent, while their average sight-word recognition (i.e. recollection of words or word parts from memory) was at an 8th-grade level. In addition, 90% of the students in this sample exhibited moderate to severe problems with phonics skills.

Similarly, in a study of 81 students in community college developmental reading classes and universities, Minus (1992) found that developmental reading students possessed significantly lower word-recognition and decoding abilities than their university peers. While all but one of the university students scored about the 12th-grade level on a word recognition test, the scores of community college students ranged from 5th – grade to above – 12th – grade levels. When presented with nonsense words – a technique designed to reveal an individual's ability to decode unfamiliar words – the community college students were able to read one-syllable nonsense words nearly as well as their higher-achieving university counterparts. But their ability to read polysyllabic nonsense words (such as uncableness and sanwizable) was significantly lower (Chall & Curtis, 1990). The research clearly suggests that phonics and word decoding problems pose significant challenges for many struggling college readers and that these problems affect their comprehension skills.

The ability to simply decode and recognize words is not enough. Readers must also be able to execute these processes rapidly in order to devote sufficient mental energy to the task of comprehension (Sabatini, 1997). After repeated exposure and with appropriate decoding skills, words and word parts are stored in a reader's memory as visual orthographic images. This allows readers to bypass the decoding stage to quickly retrieve words from memory. For skilled readers, this process takes place within 20 milliseconds of encountering most words (Ashby, 2006, as cited in Strucker, 2008). This automaticity allows readers to concentrate on comprehension (Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1986). In contrast, slow and laborious readers face two major obstacles to comprehension. First, they must dedicate more mental effort toward decoding, leaving limited cognitive resources for meaning-making (Apel & Swank, 1999; Adams, 1994; Perfetti, 1985). Second, slow reading taxes short-term memory, making it more difficult to retain the long and complicated sentences often found in college texts (Strucker, 2008).

In light of the typical college student's workload, this choppy and hesitant style of reading poses a practical challenge for the poor reader. A part-time student can expect 80 pages of reading per week for one course (Wardem 2005), while full-time students are assigned an average of 20 pages of textbook and outside reading per week (Nist & Diehl, 1994). This workload is substantial even for the average college freshmen reading 263 words per minute (Carver, 1990), but may prove overwhelming for students with particularly slow reading rates. Some research indicates that poor readers are able to tackle only 133 to 156 words per minute, lagging the average college freshman's rate by 100 words per minute (Elkind, Black & Murray, 1996; Sabatini, 2002).

The literature regarding decoding and fluency strategies for college students is limited, though some researchers have noted some potentially beneficial pedagogical practices. The strategies that follow have all been field-tested in college classes. In addition to identifying potential strategies for supporting college students' decoding and fluency development, researchers have also noted approaches that appear to be less successful.

Independent Work: In a study of 18 community college students enrolled in a

developmental reading course, Kuehner (1999) found that students who completed 18 hours of independent study in a reading lab did not show gains in reading comprehension or reading rate. Participants in this study read independently from texts, answered a series of comprehension questions, and recorded their own reading rates. They also used Ultimate Reader, a software program for increasing reading rates. The results of this study were replicated by findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), which found that self-sustained silent reading did not seem to impact students' reading rates. Kuehner (1999) concluded that a reading program, whether text-or computer-based, that requires students to read passages and answer questions independently does not benefit students, as measured by standardized tests. These findings support the argument that instruction matters.

Texts with Cue Boundaries:- Research suggests that students with fluency challenges have difficulties identifying meaningful “chunks” of texts, such as distinguishing dependent phrases from independent clauses, and that they struggle with identifying appropriate pause points in a sentences (Chall, 1983). In an attempt to address these challenges, 42 developmental reading students in one study were assigned to read either unmarked texts or texts in which slash marks were used to indicate “cue boundaries” demarcating appropriate pause points (Rasinski, 1984). Results showed no differences between the two groups on comprehension post-tests, but significantly slower reading rates for the group that received texts with explicitly cued phrase boundaries (Rasinski, 1984). Rasinski proposed that the obtrusiveness of these boundaries may have interfered with comprehension. In later work with adolescent readers, Rasinski and colleagues (2005) found that repeated reading and choral reading are two strategies that better help to develop fluency.

Speed Reading Instruction and Software:- While students may be trained to read rapidly by limiting the amount of time they fixate on individual words, research suggests that there is a trade-off. Increased reading rates often come at the expense of decreases in accuracy and comprehension (Just & Carpenter, 1984). Two studies on the use of speed-reading software with community college students in developmental reading classes showed no significant differences in post-test reading rates between students who read on paper and those who used speed reading packages (Kuehner, 1999; Wepner, Feeley, & Wilde, 1989). Eye movement

research may help explain these findings. While it was once commonly accepted that slow eye movements caused reading difficulties, researchers now know that it is the difficulty of a text that determines a reader's eye movement patterns (Stanovich, 1986). While reading software programs have clearly involved over the past decade, instructors interested in using such technology should carefully research products and monitor student progress to ensure that software programs are helping students achieve their reading goals.

Recent research, however, has suggested that the issue of reading fluency goes beyond the primary grades. Our own work among struggling elementary-grade students (grades 1-5) referred for Title I supplementary reading instruction (Title I is a U.S. federally funded program for at risk students) by their regular classroom teacher found that the lack of reading fluency appeared to be the area of greatest impairment in reading (Rasinski & Padak, 1998). Pinnell et al. (1995) study of the relationship between oral reading fluency and fourth graders' silent reading comprehension found that nearly half of the 1,000 + sample of fourth-grade students had not yet achieved a minimal level of reading fluency.

One hypothesized explanation for the connection between fluency and comprehension comes from LBerger and Samauel's (1974) theory of automaticity in reading. According to this theory, readers who have not yet achieved automaticity in word recognition (fluency) must apply a significant amount of their finite cognitive energies to consciously decode the words they encounter while reading. Cognitive attention or energy that must be applied to the low-level decoding task of reading is cognitive energy that is taken away from the more important task of comprehending the text. Hence, comprehension is negatively affected by a reader's lack of fluency.

Our work in a university reading clinic indicates that difficulties in reading fluency are manifested in the majority of students in grades 2 through 8 who are referred for reading difficulties. Although the primary reason for referral may ostensibly be difficulties in reading comprehension (especially among intermediate and middle-grade students), we also find that a lack of fluency accompanies the difficulties in comprehension. Our clinical intervention program provides work in fluency and comprehension, and for the most part, students make significant gains in both area.

Fluency beyond the Elementary Grades

Although fluency is generally thought of as an elementary grade issue, we wondered if fluency could be still be an issue in the reading difficulties experienced by large numbers of students beyond the elementary grades. In particular, middle and high school students from urban areas appear to experience more difficulty in reading than students from nonurban areas (e.g., National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Could one source of their difficulties in reading stem from a lack of reading fluency?

To answer this question, we assessed the decoding accuracy and fluency levels of a large group of ninth-grade students at the end of the school year. In this study, fluency was defined as students' reading rate. Although reading rate does not capture the full meaning of fluency, it is considered a useful and valid measure of fluency (Rasinski, 2004). The ninth graders in this school, which is part of a moderate-sized urban district in the U.S. Midwest, have generally performed poorly on the state high school graduation tests- a series of tests across important content areas in which students read and respond to text passages that reflect the various content domains. On one day during the last week of the school year (June, 2003) we visited the high school at which half of the school district's freshmen were enrolled. We selected the last week of the school year to ensure that the reading samples we obtained reflected the most advanced levels of reading exhibited by students during the year. During the day, we tested 303 students using a one-minute reading probe, also known as Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) in reading or Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Assessment (Deno, 1985; Deno, Mirkin, & Chiang, 1982; Maston, 1989; Rasinski, 2004). Working individually with one of us, students read a ninth-grade level passage, taken from the Secondary and College Reading Inventory (Johns, 1990), for one minute. Although we recognized that the passage may have been at a frustration level for some students, using grade-level materials is the convention for CBM/ORF assessments (Rasinski). Students were asked to read orally in their normal voices and were told that they would be asked to retell what they had read at the end of the reading. During the reading we marked any uncorrected errors students made during the one-minute period. We also asked them to do a quick retell of what they had read. The primary purpose for the retelling was to ensure that students read in a normal

manner- to read for understanding rather than speed.

The high school at which we worked was divided into individual “houses” in order to provide students with a smaller, more intimate learning environment. Students were randomly assigned at the beginning of the school year to one of the houses. We positioned ourselves at each house to that reading samples of students from all segments of the school could be taken. Teachers who were willing to allow their students to leave class for periods of less than five minutes provided us with students to assess. We were assured by the teachers and administrators in the school that the students we tested were a representative sample of all of the students in the school.

From the one-minute reading we were able to determine each student’s word-recognition level, as measured by percentage of words read correctly, and reading fluency, as determined by number of words read correctly in the time period. We were also able to obtain students’ performance scores on the state high school graduation test- a silent reading comprehension test across all major subject areas that they had taken earlier. The high school graduation test consists of a series of passages read silently, and each passage is followed by a set of comprehension questions. The test is given in the ninth grade, and students are required to pass it in order to qualify for a high school diploma. Based on our reading assessment, we found that the end-of-the year ninth graders in this urban school read with an average word-recognition accuracy rate of 97.4% (Standard deviation = 2.8%) correct and a reading fluency rate of 136.4 (standard deviation = 33.2) words correct per minute, now just what do these scores mean? For word recognition, it appears that the students were able to decode words quite accurately.

Normally, a 95% word-recognition accuracy level is considered to be an instructional level. Thus, the students in our sample displayed, on average, strong proficiency in word recognition.

Purpose of the Assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to review methods that produce productive results for ESL readers. These practical strategies have proven to have positive

results in classroom settings.

A second grade ESL reading class was in small groups of five to six children. One group was with the teacher, the next group was working on a skill for the day at their seats and the third group was in smaller groups of twos in centers focusing yet on another reading skills. They took approximately 40 minutes in each group. the groups were flexibly grouped. Each group had a name that related to a story element – one called, ‘Main Idea’, another called, ‘Character’, and the third called, ‘Setting’. Since the children hear the terms all year long, then later in the year when they are doing a play, or when writing begins, the students have already established that a story is composed using all of these elements.

Successful Strategies and Ways to Connect with Students

Strategies learned from 21 years of teaching and practicing, experimenting, being consistent, and discovering ways to connect to the student’s everyday application have proven to be successful. Goals for each students by the end of the year are for him/her not only to comprehend what they read but to read fluently over (60+) words a minute faster than when he/she first walked into the room.

The goal is for students to understand the vocabulary from the first day of reading each new story, not only the correct pronunciation but also the true meaning of it. Two parts of the words are printed on a sentence strip. The first part is the word to be recognized. The second part is the meaning. After much discussion of the word and the syllables, short, long vowel, blends, using it in a sentence, etc. then the students are asked, “which meaning do you think the word is? this, according to the research, are the areas of the reading process where learners’ fluency is diagnosed “(letter, syllable, word, phrase, sentence, and/or paragraph reading) leads to increases in reading achievement for beginning readers” (p4) in “Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction”, National Fluency Government Partnership for Reading from 2007. After this process, the story begins with each child taking a turn reading the passage one page at a time. The teacher asks relevant, comprehensive questions as each page is read.

The second day the students may take turns and ask each other comprehension

questions, depending on the passage length. Along with this, the students may be asked questions using a graphic organizer to convey the plot, character analysis, story elements, etc. to enable them to comprehend the story.

The third day the story is read again, this time in paired reading using stand-up folder dividers so as not to make it a competition for each pair. During the reading, the partner may help the one who is reading, and the teacher listens to different groups. After they finish reading, the students have small hand-held cards to ask each other many questions. They come from the Reading Academy for second grade. They are questions such as: What did you like most about the story? What new words did you learn? What was the main idea of the story?, etc. After taking up the dividers and small cards there should be much discussion on the summary of the story. They are asked, "If your mom asks you, 'what did you read today in class?' she would get a very good idea of the characters, setting, plot,' a little detail, and main idea of the story you just read. When they "talk" it out, the teacher writes it on a small white board, as they tell her what took place.

The teacher gives each child a small hand-held card for them to see, as it is strategy for telling the summary. It reads (on the card): someone...wanted.....so.....but....then..... this gives a skeleton to the things needed to connect the important happenings to the story. By the middle of the school year, they are writing full sentences of the summary on their own.

The fourth day, the students read the story and listen to an accompanying tape. They listen to the tape the first time around in their small group, and the second time they read one-on-one with the tape reader. If they begin to be behind the pace of the person reading, the tape may be stopped and they are to do it over again as well as follow along with their finger to get their eyes moving faster along the page. In doing this, they get accustomed to the correct fluency week after week along with the correct inflection of the voices. The students might do vowel connection work in their reading journals. This might be blends, sound a likes, prefixes, root words, comparisons of sounds etc. As the weeks go by the students have begun to be on their way to better fluency.

The assessment refers to the K-6. Research: “the NRP review of research related on phonics instruction found that children’s reading fluency improves when they are taught decoding using systematic approaches to phonics instruction” (p65) in “Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction”, National Fluency Government Partnership for Reading.

By the fifth day, they are through with their story, and they will do a holistic approach from the reading to writing. The students might write poems on fall leaves that they have just read in the story book about Henry and Mudge. They write fall poems with their use of descriptive words about the brilliant, colourful fall leaves, using adjectives, nouns, vivid verbs, and prepositional phrases. Perhaps they read about a park, so they will creatively write about the day they went to a park. Since they are learning about the compass rose in social studies, not only will they draw their very own park using N-S-E-W and a key map showing where everything is but they will write a narrative about all the activities they did using descriptive words in their stories. They have words they can “grab on to” that they have been brainstormed, words they have seen, smelled, heard, (using onomatopoeia words), felt, etc. their stories have settings, characters, places (which brings in proper nouns), things they did with emphasis on their feelings, etc. The next approach would be in writing narratives using quotes. This way they will have some communication going on using “said” words. It is encouraged for them to use the “said” words only once and choose any other synonyms of the said words (of about 50) that are hanging on a poster board all year long. Going right along with what Suzanne Reid said in the book -Book Bridges for ESL Students. “....provide opportunities for students to practice. English-push them gently to speak, read, copy, write, ask, respond, answer, compare, contrast and even complain” (p6) Book Bridges for ESL students 2002-2004.

Another important strategy is homework, which is given to them once a week all year long. Take-Home-Readers that go along with the story read during the week. It is not the same story, but the keep words are the same. It is copied off for them each Monday, and they are to grid the time it took them to read it on Monday of each week. Along with this, the parent is to sign off each time they read every day. The first time on Monday they have to time it, and then the last time on Thursday they have to time it. Each day the student is to read twenty minutes of selected Take-Home readers.

They can read other books on the side if they so desire such as library books, books they have at home etc. however, the main purpose in this exercise is for them to compete against themselves. This has to be emphasized, as it takes the pressure off winning or losing. The teacher then follows up by looking at the grid every Friday and congratulating them for trying or improving. They will have about 36 small Take-Home-Readers for the summer to read, too! They are to keep the readers in a very special place so they can have these books for their very own and read them again and again whenever they want.

In the researched-based principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction the author emphasize fluency: "the repeated reading of passages of text, words from text and other text units" are all used. "Several studies have used repeated reading to improve student fluency. Students read the same text several times until they are able to read it rapidly and accurately" (p7) "Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction", National Fluency Government Partnership for Reading. The research from K-12 level found that "procedures that have students reading passages orally multiple times while receiving guidance or feedback from peers, parents, or teachers are effective in improving a variety of reading skills". In the same statement it teachers are effective in improving a variety of reading skills". In the same statement it reads: Many procedures, such as repeated reading (with and without feedback). Paired reading, shared reading, and collaborative or assisted oral reading, seem to be effective". This research states: the NRP review of procedures such as Sustained Silent Reading and others that encourage students to read more (and thus perhaps develop their reading fluency) does not find that these approaches are effective in improving students' reading" (p8) "Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction" National Fluency Government Partnership for Reading.

One more thing that is added throughout the year to the fluency is "Reader's theater" The teacher first reads it to each reading group to get the feel, main idea, energy, voice of different characters, and visualizes the play itself. The next day the play is read together, and the third day they choose which character they want to read. Two or three students can be chosen for the same character. The important part of this is to have them get into the play where they don't feel the least bit intimidated, and they

feel comfortable. Later, they read the whole play to themselves, practice peer reading, and eventually they all read as one big group. The play starts to take them. the characters are chosen for the parts, the cues are learned, projection of voice is- practices, the character's emotions are rehearsed, The setting or scene is set, the makeup is created, costumed are prepared if needed, the students memorize the play, and finally it is time for the performance. All in all, it takes a little over two weeks to perfect. Sometimes they will even create a playbill with the summary, character's names, and a little about the director. The parents are invited as well as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. At times they will invite principals, teachers, and students of different classes to be the audience.

As an extension of the play, for example, Johnny Appleseed, the class can write in letter format to a distant relative of his and ask questions they might still have concerning the character, write what they liked about him or what they learned. They have extended the play by generating the concept of a time line using the main events of John's life. The elaboration of his life is given in full details of their readings and brings forth rich writings. This goes right along with Suzanne Reid's book as she has said, "...time line of man events that led up to (an example) American Revolution giving full details by the readings – then take up what they say and clarify by using pictures"-giving time for speech and write as much as possible (p9) Suzanne E. Reid's Book Bridges for ESL Students 2002-2004.

At the end of the school year, a story is taken either from social studies, a reading book, and the students originate their own play from the readings. They hear the end for narrator, the sound effects using onomatopoeia words, the characters and what they should say, the props for a setting or scene, the clothing, etc. This way they can do something that is both fun and creative, in the pursuit of reading fluency over the summer, with their friends and relatives.

Phases of Development in Learning to Read by Adults

One of the great mysteries confronting literacy researchers is how mature readers are able to read written materials so rapidly and fluently yet with full comprehension (Adams, 1990; Barron, 1986; Chall, 1983; Perfetti, 1998; Rayner and Pollatsek, 1989). A capability that has proven central in explaining this feat is the ability to read single

words rapidly and automatically by sight (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974). Readers are able to look at a word and immediately recognize its meaning without expending any effort decoding the word. Moreover, sight of the word triggers recognition despite readers' intention to ignore the word (Guttentag and Haith, 1978). A major task for researchers has been to explain how beginners acquire the ability to recognize sight words rapidly and automatically.

There are other ways that words might be read, but these are used mainly for words not known by sight (Ehri, 1991, 1994). Decoding or phonological recoding refers to the process of transforming graphemes into phonemes and blending the phonemes into pronunciations. Reading by analogy refers to the process of using known sight words to read unknown words that share letters, for example, reading BLIGHT by analogy to NIGHT (Cunningham, 1976; Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Marsh et al., 1981). Reading by predicting refers to the process of generating educated guesses about words based on context cues or initial letters or both (Goodman, 1976). Although these other means of reading words are available to readers, sight words reading is invoked the most because this process is fast and automatic.

It is important to dispel words are read by sight. It is not true that only irregularly spelled words are read by sight. Rather all words, even easily decoded words, become sight words once they have been read several times. Also, it is not true that sight words reading refers to the flashcard method of teaching students to read words. Sight word reading refers not to a method of teaching reading but to the process of reading words by accessing them in memory (Ehri, 1992). Another misconception is that sight words learning involves memorizing the shapes of words or other visual features and has nothing to do with letter-sound correspondences. This is not true. The research we have conducted over the years.

Phases of Sight Word Development

Reveals that mature forms of sight word learning are alphabetic and phonological at root (Ehri, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1992).

Basically, sight words are words that readers have read accurately several times. Readers recognize the words by remembering how they were read previously. The

term 'sight' indicates that sight of the word triggers that word in memory, including information about its spelling, pronunciation and meaning. How to explain this capability is not easy. an adequate account must explain how readers are able to look at specific printed words they have read before and immediately locate their pronunciations and meanings in memory while bypassing thousands of other words, including those with very similar spellings or meanings (Ehri, 1992). Moreover, an adequate explanation must cover how readers are able to store and remember new words easily after very few encounters reading the words (Ehri, 1980; Reitsma, 1983). The kind of process thought to be at the heart of sight words learning is a connection-forming process. Connections are formed that link the written forms of words to their pronunciations and meanings. This information is stored in the reader's word memory bank or lexicon.

In studying the course of development of sight word learning, we have found that different types of connections predominate at different points in development (Ehri, 1991, 1994). Sight words learning begins as a non-alphabetic process involving memory for connections between letters in written words and sounds in their pronunciations. At first connections are partial, linking the most salient letters to sounds. When readers acquire full knowledge of the alphabetic system, complete connections can be formed between graphemes in spellings and phonemes in the pronunciation of words. As sight words accumulate in memory in fully analyzed forms, letter patterns recurring in different words become consolidated into multi-letter units symbolizing phonological blends. Alphabetic connections linking all of the letters in spellings to their pronunciations enable mature readers to represent thousands of words uniquely in their mental lexicons and to locate the pronunciations and meanings of these words accurately and automatically upon seeing them in print (Ehri, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1992; Perfetti, 1992).

To capture the changes that occur in the development of sight words reading I have distinguished four phases characterized by the involvement of the alphabetic system. This system represents the regularities that underlie the written forms of English words and that all learners must internalize in order to build a fully functioning sight vocabulary. The term 'alphabetic' indicates not simply that words consist of letters but that the letters function as symbols for phonemes and phoneme blends in the

words. The four phases are: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic. Each phase is labeled to reflect the pre-dominant type of connection that links the written forms of sight words to their pronunciations and meanings in memory.

You may be more familiar with other terms referring to the first and fourth phases, based on Frith's stage theory (1985): logographic rather than pre-alphabetic, and orthographic rather than consolidated alphabetic. Several reasons necessitated replacing Frith's labels. A number of researchers including Philip Gough and Connie Juel (personal Communication) consider the term 'logographic' to be misleading because beginners in the first phase do not read words like mature readers of logographic orthographies such as Chinese. Whereas beginners remember selected visual cues to read sight words, true logographic readers remember sight words as analyzed Gestalts. The term 'Orthographic' is replaced because a variety of meanings have been imposed on it by researchers, hence rendering the term too general and ambiguous. My term is more precise and makes explicit the fact that processing continues to be alphabetic but involves consolidating letters into larger units in contrast to previous phases.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the area of difficulties faced by ESL Adult learners in reading English language text.
- Identify the level of proficiency of ESL learners in reading English language.
- To analyse ESL learners perception on reading English text.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design which according to Creswell(2012) is a procedure of describing a particular phenomenon. A total of 50 ESL learners were selected out of 110 students from General Studies of Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic Bauchi who were undertaking English Communication Skills. This figure represents 40% and according to Creswell (2012) when the population is not large 40% could be selected to represent the whole. Questionnaire and Reading Aloud process were used as a research instruments to elicit the data. It was designed based on the objectives of the study and administered to the respondents.

The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency.

Data Analysis

Table 1 Difficulties faced by learners in reading English text.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Fear of mistakes	10	20%
Fear of audience	16	32%
Poor foundation	20	40%
Lack of Confidence	4	8%
Total	50	100%

There are four difficulties faced by the respondents in reading English. The table above shows that 40% are faced with the challenge of poor foundation, 32% indicates fear of colleagues to laugh at them, 20% are afraid of making mistakes while 5% denotes lack of confidence.

Table 2 Difficulties faced by learners in learning English.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Inability to pronounce certain work	20	40%
Lack of understanding of new words	16	32%
Difficulties in comprehending new words	14	28%
Total	50	100%

The table above indicates that 20% of the respondents who represent 40% have difficulties in pronouncing certain words especially those with silent letters such as: debt comb and plumber 32% indicates lack of understanding of new words while 14% find it difficult to comprehend new words.

Table 3 Level of Proficiency of Learner sin Reading.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Fluent	13	22%
Not fluent	47	78%
Total	50	100%

It is clear in the table above that only 13 frequency representing 22% are fluent whereas 47 frequency representing 78% are not. This can be attributed to the poor foundation and fear of negative judgment from colleagues as indicated in table 1.

Table 4 Level of Perception of Learners in Reading.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Good perception	25	50%
Not concerned	11	22%
Difficult	14	23%
Total	50	100%

The table above reveals that 25% of the respondents have good perception on reading. 22% are not concerned while 23% perceived it as a difficult task.

Conclusion

The paper has revealed a number of problems faced by ESL learners in reading and learning English language. The problems can be summarized to Lack of exposure therapy which has been identified as a major factor militating against the smooth reading fluency and learning English of the respondents. It is therefore suggested that there is the need for teachers to device means through exercises that would expose the students reading fluency. The exercises should focus from English phonemes recognition that would expose the students on the appropriate ways of

words pronunciation. This will go a long way in improving students reading fluency in particular and English language learning in general.

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