

# THE TELEVISION FACTOR IN VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of television viewing frequency on the performance in vocabulary development of SS 3 students in Cross River State, Nigeria. Data were obtained through questionnaires and a vocabulary test administered to 993 students in selected public and private schools in Cross River State. Data analyses indicated that high frequency television viewers performed significantly better than moderate viewers, while moderate viewers performed significantly better than did the low frequency viewers in vocabulary development.

**KEY WORDS:** television viewing, vocabulary development, achievement

## INTRODUCTION

The West African Examination Council (1997, 1999, 2001, 2002) frequently comments on candidates' poor vocabulary and expression, resulting in poor performances in subjects ranging from English Language to Physics. In view of the central position of English Language in the academic, social and economic well-being of the Nigerian student, poor performance in it can be catastrophic, not only to the candidate, but also to the society. Calhoun (1999) explains that the more words one possesses the better one communicates; the better one is at acquiring words the more control one has over one's academic progress; and the more words a student can comprehend and use correctly, the better the student's processing skills. Deficiency in English vocabulary can be a great limitation to anyone that needs to survive in an environment where English is the tool of politics, education, commerce, religion, and information, among others.

Although *Vocabulary* is just one of the contents of the English Language syllabus, problems with vocabulary are likely to affect candidates' performance not only in English Language, but also in other content subjects. Adequate vocabulary is indispensable in comprehending and answering examination

questions. Taiwo (2004), therefore, has emphasised the value of appropriate vocabulary in second language learning.

In addition to many other sources of language acquisition, English vocabulary may be acquired through books, newspapers, and television. Television is an important source of language acquisition (Naigles and Mayeux (2001). Television broadcast in Nigeria is mainly in English. From the news to commercials, English dominates the airwaves. Therefore, in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) environment such as Nigeria, television might well be a major window to better English language stimuli and model. It provides better, more sophisticated and diverse information and education. Since students are likely to revert to their mother tongues after school, the television might help to reinforce language skills learnt at school. Its effect on the Nigerian secondary school student, therefore, may depend on the extent to which it is utilized.

However, television has been variously criticized for negative impact on academic achievement. For instance, Wright and colleagues (2001) associate high exposure to general audience television with poorer language levels. They attribute these low language scores to programme content rather than time spent watching television. General audience

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programmes are not deliberately designed for instruction, but for entertainment. They include soaps, movies, news, documentaries, football matches, reality television shows, talk shows, comedies, cartoons, etc.

In practice, however, there does not seem to be any programme that is completely devoid of educational content. Vicarious learning is still possible from even so-called general audience programmes. Besides, these programmes vary in their language contents. Football matches for instance would not be as rich in language content as news broadcast. Nevertheless, in an English-as-a-Second-Language context like Nigeria, any source of language exposure is important.

In this regard, Neuman(1995) strongly believes that the television has opened up new gateways of learning for children, sweeping away many of the conceptual and logical barriers to extending children's experiences posed by other media, while exposing them to ideas, events, and places that were once for adults alone. McCarty (2004) shares similar sentiments, pointing out that television has wonderful positive potential for learning and development, is a better medium than the printed word for conveying certain kinds of information, and makes learning easier for children who do not fare as well in traditional learning atmospheres. The informality of the television, its novelty, its multisensory appeal as well as the realism it conjures, combine to give it an edge over the traditional language learning classroom.

Furthermore, television has been accused of displacing reading time and thereby impeding intellectual abilities (Winn, 2002, ). The implication is that when television and reading compete for time and attention, television often gains mastery as the more attractive. In other climes, this may be true. But in Nigeria the inadequacy and instability in electricity supply limit the time when television is available and accessible. Thus, whether the students like it or not, reading which is less dependent on electricity would maintain primacy in spite of television. Neuman (1995) and Reeves (1998) reject the charges against the television as unwarranted. They argue that on the contrary, there is a spirited interplay between print and video activities that may spark children's interests and enhance literacy opportunities.

It appears that the amount of time used in viewing is related to achievement. The relationship is, however curvilinear (Reeves, 1998, Razel, 2001). For small amounts of

viewing, achievement increased with viewing, but as viewing increased beyond a certain point, achievement decreased. Optimal time seems to be ten hours in a week (Razel, 2001.)

Research further associates the television subtitling with vocabulary gains. For instance, Koolstra and Beenjes.(1999) found that Dutch students in Grades 4 and 6 watching an English television programme with Dutch subtitles performed better in Vocabulary acquisition and recognition of English words than those watching the same English programme without subtitles, and watching a Dutch television programme . According to the National Centre for Improved Practice (2005), the multi-sensory characteristics of captioned video (video, audio and print) offer students the opportunity to enlarge their vocabulary by viewing words in meaningful and stimulating contexts. For students in a second language setting, subtitling is a great asset. Usually foreign programmes may be difficult to decode aurally due to the speed and pronunciation of the native speakers. The appearance of the dialogues in text on the screen simultaneously enhances the comprehension and participation of the viewer in the television programme or movie.

Most of the studies on the impact of television are based on non-Nigerian environment and contexts. Often, the focus of many studies is on preschool and primary school students. The present study, on the other hand, was situated in the Nigerian context, while it targeted post-primary school students. The interest in this population was informed by the fact that they form the pool from which universities draw their entrants. The quality of these entrants with respect to their communication skills has been a subject of great concern to the Nigerian academics and the society. It is reasonable, therefore, to investigate the role of television viewing in the vocabulary development of Nigerian students

## METHODOLOGY

The study area was Cross River State, Nigeria. The population comprised post primary school students in public and private schools. Nine hundred and ninety three (993) male and female Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students constituted the sample. Data were collected via researcher-structured questionnaires and a vocabulary test. The data were analysed using the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

**Hypothesis:**

SS 3 students who are low, moderate or high frequency television viewers do not differ significantly in their vocabulary acquisition performance.

The one-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in testing the hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 2. The result of the study showed that the low frequency viewers had a mean score of 9.3 in vocabulary acquisition, while the moderate and the high viewers had

mean scores of 10.7 and 12.9, respectively. The calculated F ratio of 36.9 was greater than the critical F (3.00) at a confidence level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that postulated no significant difference in vocabulary acquisition performance among low, moderate and high frequency television viewers was rejected. This means that SS 3 students in Cross River State, Nigeria who are low, moderate or high frequency television viewers do differ significantly in their vocabulary acquisition performance.

**TABLE 1:** One- way analysis of variance of the influence of frequency of television viewing on vocabulary acquisition performance of SS 3 students in Cross River State

| Frequency of TV viewing | N       | $\bar{X}$ | SD    |       |          |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|
| Low                     | 204     | 9.3       | 6.2   |       |          |
| Moderate                | 626     | 10.7      | 1.9   |       |          |
| High                    | 163     | 12.9      | 6     |       |          |
| Total                   | 993     | 10.97     | 4.7   |       |          |
| Sources of variation    | SS      | Df        | MS    | F     | F. Crit. |
| Between Group           | 1183.4  | 2         | 591.7 | *36.9 | 3.00     |
| Within Group            | 15892   | 990       | 36.8  |       |          |
| Total                   | 17075.4 | 992       |       |       |          |

**\*Significant at .05 Alpha**

To find out the pair that differed significantly from each other, a post hoc pairwise comparison was performed using the Scheffe's test. The result of the Scheffe's test is presented in Table 2. The Scheffe's test indicated that high

frequency viewers performed better than both the moderate and the low frequency viewers, while the moderate viewers performed better than the low frequency viewers.

**TABLE 2:** Scheffe's test comparison of the means of low, moderate and high frequency TV viewers in vocabulary acquisition performance

| Groups          | Fs   | F- prime | Significance |
|-----------------|------|----------|--------------|
| Low & Moderate  | 17.8 | 6.00     | Significant  |
| Low & High      | 72   | 6.00     | Significant  |
| Moderate & High | 37.2 | 6.00     | Significant  |

**DISCUSSION**

The findings suggest that television viewing influences vocabulary acquisition. This agrees with earlier studies, which linked television viewing with vocabulary gains (Braunlich & Cennamo, 1996; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999, Naigles & Mayeux 2001). However, the present study contradicts the findings of Wright and colleagues (2001) that

associate high exposure to general audience television with poorer language levels.

Our findings could be because in television programmes in Cross River State are predominantly in English and many programmes have subtitles. The Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) regularly as well as many satellite networks broadcasts foreign and local news programmes, documentaries, children

programmes, which often expose viewers to English words and expressions as spoken by first language speakers. Besides, the inconsistency in electricity supply limits the time within which the television is available. Thus viewers may very well be within the threshold of ten hours per week which is said to be beneficial (Razel, 2001).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study indicates that secondary school students in Cross River State could develop their vocabulary from watching television. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered: First, teachers of English should utilize the television as an instructional resource to advance vocabulary acquisition. It is too late to ignore the television. It has a great appeal and should be deliberately harnessed for vocabulary building. For instance, students may be asked to watch a particular programme, make a list and use a dictionary to provide the meanings of ten new words they have learnt. In addition, students could be asked to write a summary of the evening news or their favourite movie. Thus a moment of sheer pleasure could be transformed to a moment of pleasurable learning. In addition, programme producers should package and broadcast regularly educational programmes that would appeal to teenagers too.

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