



Literacy: A Way Forward for Quality Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the assessment of literacy as a way forward for quality primary education in Nigeria. Literacy is a life-blood of an individual skills, knowledge, attitude and potentialities. Therefore, assessment in teaching and learning of English gives the teacher the evaluative picture of students' linguistic background, language competency and the needs of the learner. moreover, the paper posits that multiple of assessments in reading and writing improve students' level of proficiency in mastering the language. The paper also examines some types of assessment which gives the language teacher an advantage of choice of testing a particular skill be applied in teaching and learning of the basic language skills. However, the paper discussed the purpose of assessment in relation to literacy.

Keywords: Literacy, Way Forward, Quality, Education.

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Introduction

Assessment is an essential element of education as it facilitates and imparts instruction stated Wren in (The Access Centre, 2005). He further maintains that the first step in implementing good reading and writing instruction in primary school is to determine students' baseline performance. Moreover, English language students come to school with diverse background in literacy, some could not read and write simple sentences while other could. Also, others have a special need that require review of basic skills in reading and writing. While, some students may have mastered the content a teacher intends to cover. Due to this, it is necessary to design literacy instruction to meet the individual needs of each student which can be determined by proper reading and writing assessment. This assessment will provide language teachers with the basic information needed to develop appropriate lessons and improve instruction for all students. The information gained from the assessment enables English language teachers to provide exceptional methods and activities that will improve students to mastering language skills

consciously. Literacy involves not just reading and writing, but a wide range of language learning and activities that facilitate understanding and assimilation of the target language. There is need to understand language teaching as it becomes part and parcel of the process of literacy assessment. Any discussion on literacy assessment must include a discussion of language; what it is, how it is learned, and how it relates to assessments (international Reading Association and the National Council of Teacher of English, 2010).

The Concept of Language Assessments

Assessment is a method of ascertaining what pupils gain from language teaching and learning in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude development by taking account of students' performances in tests, assignments, projects and other school activities during a particular period of time, that is: term, year or even an entire period of an educational program. Similarly, it is also referring to a method of using the recorded performance of each student to help him or her achieve the expected goal. However, essentially,



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assessment contains all features of formative evaluation, that is, periodic evaluation for the purpose of diagnosis and remedial action. It is intended to cover not only the cognitive aspect but also the affective and psychomotor domains. Affectively, it tests the emotional and affective factors responsible for human action (Olugbodi, 2011). She further maintained that assessment is a method using the recorded performance of each pupil to help him or her improve on his or her achievement through individual guidance. Also, Nwoke & Okoyeukwu (2017) assert that assessment can also be defined as a collection of information about a students' knowledge, skills and attitude as well as the judgment, the interpretation, and the planned action that follows. National Teachers institute (2017) sees assessment as the process of organizing test data into interpretable forms on a number of factors. This data could be obtained through the use of wide variety of instruments like tests, interview and checklist. An assessment could be complete when the teacher has employed several test of different aspects of learning (cognitive, psychomotor and affective). Moreover, it also refers to as total recollection of students' judgement or means of checking what students can do with the language. Nwoke and Okoyeukwu (2017) noted that proper assessment gives due weight to the positive or negative side of students' achievement. They further maintained that assessment could be carried out before, during or after the course. It may be of individual student or to check the capability of a whole class. Therefore, assessment concerned with the ability of teaching as well as the quality of learning the language.

Concept of Literacy

According to UNESCO in Montoya (2018) Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. He further maintained that literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. The concept of literacy has been

examined from a sociological viewpoint as stated by Guthrie & Kirsch in Elley (2009). They saw the concept involving a social-interaction perspective such as what were the purposes of reading texts, how the readers interpret the text, how the readers communicate with the writer and how the readers communicate what they read with his language teacher, since they might need to discuss the content of the text. Discussing the ideas and information acquired from the text with other people allowed readers to construct text meaning in various contexts and this social interaction could be an instrument in helping students gain understanding as well as appreciating the texts (NTI, 2007; Mullis, et al., 2016). They further stated that reading was a "social experience carried out for a variety of purposes, with a variety of materials, text organizations and styles, to serve the needs of the learner who could not read and write fluently. A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) defined Reading literacy as "the ability to understand, use, and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society" (OECD, 2012, p.21). Therefore, Literacy involves the ability of individuals to use written information to achieve their goals, and consequently they are able to use this information to function effectively in modern societies. These definitions of reading literacy reflect numerous theories of reading literacy as a constructive and interactive process (Ruddel & Unrau, 2014). Readers construct meaning actively and know reading strategies and how to reflect on reading and writing. Learners also construct meaning through interaction with text in the context of a particular reading experience as noted by Silvia (2018).

To understand the nature of literacy we first need to think the term "literacy". Literacy has traditionally been regarded as having to do with the ability to read and write. More recently, literacy has evolved to encompass multidimensional abilities such as listening, speaking and writing, viewing and performing



along with the cultural and societal factors that facilitate or constrain literacy development (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). According to Snow (2010) nature of literacy in the whole world is continually changing. Today, many children read more online than offline. The children growing into a digital world in which very little reading and writing involves paper, most reading and writing involved images as much as print and writing - both formal and less formal, the latter including e-mail, texts, Facebook posts – is becoming equal to, or even supplementing reading as a primary literacy engagement. The tools of literacy are changing rapidly as new forms of Internet Communication Technology (ICT) are created, including (at the time of writing) bulletin boards, web editors, blogs, virtual worlds, and social networking sites such as Ning and My Space (International Reading Association & National Council for Teachers, 2010). Literacy is ability to read and write prose and other prints texts, it is an integrated complex of language and thinking processes and skills, incorporating a range of habits, attitudes, interests and knowledge, serving a range of learning purpose (DSE/CEOV, 2016). New literate practices are learned and refined just by existing from day to day in what has become known as the media sphere. For example, living with cell phone leads to texting, which changes how students view writing and how they write as they mostly involved in video-sharing service, YouTube, and whatnot which were some of the privileges students encounter toward fast learning how to read and write. The literacies students encounter by the end of their schooling were unimagined when they began. Reading and writing online changes what it means to read, write, and comprehend. Reading and writing are intrinsically linked, complementary processes. in the act of writing, writers go through cognitive processes which promote a sensitivity to language, making, thus, analytic reading possible (Boudersa, 2013). Literary is seen to be a total ability of an individual or learner to read, write and comprehend what has been written.

Literacy Assessment

Literacy assessment is a method of testing, assessing and evaluating the performance of an individual or student on the already learnt or about to be learnt language skills such as reading and writing. Adam (2010) noted that literacy is overly simplified by assessments that are not multidimensional or authentic, such as the overuse of multiple-choice questions. Educators may find the lack of authenticity of these assessments frustrating when results do not appear to represent what their students know and can do. On the other hand, more authentic assessment method, such as observing students who are deliberating the meaning of the texts during group discussions do not precisely measure

Even though, the assessment of literacy using multiple choice items versus more authentic procedures seems like opposites, they do have an important feature in common: they both can provide answers to educational questions. Whether one approach is more valuable than the other, or whether both are needed, depends entirely on the kind of questions being asked. So if someone asks you if a multiple choice test is a good test or if observing a student's reading is a better assessment procedure, your answer will depend on many different factors, such as the purpose of the assessment, along with the quality of the assessment tool, the skills of the person who is using it, and the educational decisions needing to be made (Adam, 2010).

Purpose of Assessment

A systematic assessment of students in language skills predicts their later reading and writing achievement. The assessment exposed students' achievement in reading such as: phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency and comprehension. While, on writing it portrayed their exposure on: mechanical skills of punctuation and spelling, style and register, controlled writing.

Similarly, assessment evaluates the literacy skills so as the teacher will judge as when the skill requires re-teaching and re-testing. In other words, the skills provide teachers with information on what skills students have and have not mastered. It is needed to help teachers know the skill levels of their students, since



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students have varying experience. Some of the purpose of assessment as maintained by Olugbodi (2011) it measures what has actually been learnt in relation to what is supposed to have been learnt. She furthered maintained that assessment could be given after a unit, chapter, or even end term.

Also, it guides the language teacher on the instruction. Through consistent assessment, a teacher can make informed decision about what instruction is appropriate for each student. However, monitoring students' progress is one of strong purpose of assessment. A teacher can learn which student need review before covering additional content and when student is ready to move forward. Olugbodi (2011) stressed that assessment could be used for placement, preparation of instructional materials, identification of area of weakness. Result of assessments could be used for re-teaching, redirection of effort or curriculum modification.

Assessment also demonstrate the effectiveness of instruction. Therefore, the information gained from assessment allows teachers to know if all students are mastering the content covered. It is important for teachers to use instructional time effectively, and this can be done when teachers are knowledgeable about what their students are ready to learn and what they already know. Therefore, the information gained from assessment allows a teacher to create appropriate instruction for their student. Therefore, it provides teachers with information on how instruction can be improved (Snow, 2002).

Types of Literacy Assessment

There are many types of assessment which includes the following:

Formal Assessment

This kind of assessment involved the use of standardized procedures that required administering and scoring the assessment in a systematic way. This kind of assessment evaluates the proficiency of students in some kind of literacy domains such as writing and reading. For example, class test. During the administration of this test, students are giving

the same amount of test, time and instruction (unless students who are disabled), and the test are scored and reported using the same marking scheme procedures. Similarly, this kind of test is similar to criterion-referenced test because they measure how students achieved in reference to "a fixed set of predetermined criteria or learning standard (Glossary, 2014). Moreover, this test is concerned with assessing an individual's successful completion of a defined task e.g. translation of certain sentences (Olugbodi, 2011). It is expected that the examinee in a criterion-referenced test should get most of the questions. However, this kind of test specifies standard of which students should meet at each state or grade level. In other word, formal assessment reflect how well students achieved in relation to these standards. For example, on a scale of 1 to 4, if a student achieved a score of '2' this score would typically reflect that the students is not yet meeting the standards for their grade, and he or she may be eligible for extra help toward meeting them.

Informal Assessment

This kind of assessment is more flexible than formal assessments because they can be adjusted according to the teachers need. Teachers make decision regarding how this assessment are done and how to interpret findings. Informal literacy assessment can easily incorporate all areas of literacy such as speaking, listening, viewing, and performing rather than focusing more exclusively on reading and writing. For example, a teacher who observes and records behaviors of a group of students who view and discuss a video is likely engaging in informal assessment of the student's reading, writing, speaking, listening and performing behavior. Also, asking students to write down something they learned during an English language art (ELA) class or something they are confused about, is a form of informal assessment. Observing students engaging in group discussions, taking notes while they plan project, and even observing the expressions on students' faces during a group activity are all types of informal assessment (Afflerbach & Cho, 2011).



Formative Assessment

This formative assessment is used to ‘form’ a plan to improve learning. This kind of assessment is given periodically during instruction to monitor pupils learning progress and to provide ongoing feedback to students and teachers. For instance, daily or weekly quizzes. In other words, formative assessment provides reinforcement of successful learning and reveals learning weaknesses in need of correction. And, it covers some predefined part of instruction for instance particular set of skill such writing or gramma. The assessment may be simple or difficult (Olugbodi, 2011).

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is used to “sum up” if students have met a specified level of proficiency or learning objective. This kind of assessment is given at the end of course or unit of instruction and the results are used primarily for assigning grades or for certifying students’ mastery of the instructional objectives. It also *summarized* the extent to which students surpass a certain level of proficiency at an end-point of instruction, such as at the end of an instruction unit or at the end of a school year. The result of this assessment might be used also for evaluating the effectiveness of the instructions. The examples of summative assessment in Nigerian system are the end of year examination (promotion examination), the National Common Entrance.

Assessment of Reading Skill

There are various ways to assess student’s reading skills. Teachers can test students, analyze student work samples, observe students’ performance in any literacy tasks, or interview students on their reading skills. Moreover, teachers can gain the most information by administering all of these methods to collect data. The following information describes various types of assessments for different areas of early reading as maintained by Rhodes & Shankling (In IRS, 2014).

Letter Knowledge: The ability to associate sounds with letters

This kind of reading assessment via letter

knowledge is to present students with a list of letters and ask the student to name each letter. Student may also be asked to separate letters from the pile of letters, numbers, and symbols. Student may be asked to separate or categorize letters by uppercase and lowercase. Some of the samples of assessment measures to test letter knowledge skills are: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Early Reading Diagnostic (ERDA).

Phonetic Awareness: The ability to hear and manipulate sound in words

This assessment of reading examines a students’ knowledge of how sounds make words. That is, making two-letter-word or three-letter word. A Student can be asked to break spoken words into parts, or to blend spoken parts of a words into one words. Additionally, a student can count the number of phonemes in a word to demonstrate understanding, or a student can delete or add a phoneme to make a new word (Adam, 2010). Some of the examples of assessment to test phonemic awareness skills includes: Comprehensive Test of Phonological processing (CTOPP), Iowa Test of Basic skills (ITBS), phonological Awareness Test (PAT), Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI).

Decoding: The process of using letters sound correspondence to recognize words

This kind of assessment examines child reading accuracy. In this kind of assessment, the teacher is to ask a student to read a passage of text as clearly and correctly as possible. The teacher records any mistakes that the student makes and analyzes them to determine what instruction is needed. Another example of an assessment of decoding skills is to present a student with isolated words and ask them to read each word aloud (wren, 2004). Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE) is a good example of this kind of assessment.

Reading Comprehension: the process of understanding the meaning of text

Reading comprehension is concerned with the testing of students who have passed beyond the purely audio-lingual state of language learning, in which reading and writing are used to



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reinforce the oral / aural learning and have proceeded to a stage in which reading and writing are taught as skills. Therefore, reading is mostly introduced when a teacher feels that the class has gained a good functional control of the spoken language (Olugbodi, 2011). Moreover, this also concerned a situation whereby a student is asked to read a passage that is equal to his ability and answer factual questions about the text. A second type involves a student answering inferential questions about implied information in the text. A third type involves a student filling in missing words from passage. The fourth types are to have a student retell the story in their own words as noted by Fuchs & Wren (in AC, 2005) the sample of assessment measures to test reading comprehension skill is Degrees of Reading (DRP).

Assessment of Writing Skills

The assessment of writing as maintained by Nwoke and Okeyeukwu, (2009) which the skill is necessary for writing good paragraphs can be grouped into the following five component

1. Language Use: the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences.
2. Mechanical skills: the ability to use correctly, those convectional peculiar to the written language e.g. punctuation, spelling etc.
3. Treatment of contents, excluding all irrelevant information
4. Stylistic Skills: The ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs and use of language effectively
5. Judgment Skill: the ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular audience in mind together with an ability to select and organize and order relevant information.

Testing Punctuation and Spelling

This kind of punctuation test is very popular. It is generally used to cover a wide range of punctuation marks. For instance, put a circle round the letter (A, B, C, or D) of the correct punctuated sentences

- A) Usman asked me if I took the book?
- B) Sani asked me, if I took the book?
- C) Sani asked, "me if I took the book"?

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D) Sani asked me if, I took the book?

As for spelling, a fairly method of testing it is through the use of multiple choice item usually containing five options, four of which are spelt correctly.

Testing Style and Register

Multiple-choice item could be used to assess students' sensitivity to style e.g. the weather has always been an important factor in people's lives:

1. Because of its effect on all aspect of farming
2. For it has considerable influence over farming
3. Since farmers concern themselves with it

Controlled Writing

There are several ways of controlling students' freedom of expression in their written work and as a consequence, increasing the reliability of scoring. These ways will prove useful protesting purpose if each student is completely familiar with the particular tasks to be performed. Its therefore very important for the teacher to give clear instruction followed by at least one example. Some of the method are:

1. Copying
2. Reordering
3. Conversion
4. Transfer of medium
5. Competition
6. Addition

Conclusion

Teaching literacy give student opportunity to be able to read and write. The ability to read, write and understand required rigorous processes of learning and asking and activities. Legion of students could make a simple sentence as well as a sensible paragraph. Therefore, this as a result of poor method of teaching literacy, lack of qualitative teachers of English language and poor knowledge of assessment to find out the progress of the student in teaching and learning of reading and writing. Assessment is a central element of knowing the need of a leaner of which if implemented regularly, will reduce the setback in reading and writing literacy.



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Through its implementation, teachers will be able to help students access the skills and content they need from the general education curriculum. This will allow all students to achieve to their highest potential.

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