



## THE CONCEPT OF NONSENSE SYLLABLES (PSEUDO WORDS) AND READING PEDAGOGY

**AYEDUN, T. Julius**

*Department of English,  
College of Humanities,  
Tai Solarin University of Education,  
P.M.B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode,  
Ogun State, Nigeria.*

### ABSTRACT

*Teaching reading at the elementary stages of learning could be a very daunting challenge to teachers at these stages of learning. This is because teachers saddled with this responsibility are sometimes ill-prepared to take up this challenge. Thus in this discourse, an attempt was made to distinguish between phonemic awareness and phonic method of teaching reading. The effort was anchored on how the concept of nonsense syllables (pseudo words) could be used to ease the tension of teaching reading at these levels of teaching. Recommendations were made to elementary teachers of reading based on the personal experience of the writer during a workshop program organised for teachers of English language in Ogun State, Nigeria.*

### Key words:

*Phonemic, Phonics, syllables, pseudo-words and alphabets*

### INTRODUCTION

Every child without any form of pathological disorder is capable of perceiving and producing speech. Put succinctly, every normal child can hear and talk. In the same vein, with good modelling from parents, teachers in school and even adults within the neighbourhood, a normal child can also read. At this stage of the child's life, learning to read is much more emphasised than reading to learn and the following aspects of reading are the primary focus of reading pedagogy:

Letter recognition and the ability to match letter with sounds (phonemic awareness).

Phonics teaching

Teaching reading through the consonants and vowel digraphs.

Teaching reading through the use of syllables and affixes.

Phrase and sentence reading

Paragraph reading

Teaching reading through connected paragraphs

One of the strategies considered to be very important to ease the tension both the parents and teachers are likely to encounter in a bid to teach reading around the aforementioned aspects of reading instruction is the crux of this academic venture. To effectively produce learners who would grow to love and appreciate the value of reading at this critical stage of the child's life, the concept of nonsense syllables (pseudo words) propounded by a German Psychologist, Hermann Ebbinghaus in 1885, has been found to be very effective and useful to teach some of the aspects of reading instructions essential at this Kstage of the learners' life. Before going into the nitty-gritty of this concept however, it is



very necessary at this juncture to discuss in detail the first two reading activities earlier highlighted, that is, phonemic awareness and phonic reading. This is because these two, to a very large extent, emphasise learning to read, an aspect of reading pedagogy under which the concept of nonsense syllable (pseudo word) is very much relevant.

**Phonemic Awareness**

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. An example of how beginning readers show us they have phonemic awareness is combining or blending the separate sounds of a word to say the word ("/c/ /a/ /t/ - cat.") (Reading Rockets, 2012, para.1).

Stanovich (1986) defined phonemic awareness as the "conscious access to the phonemic level of the speech stream, and some ability to manipulate cognitive representations at this level. (p.362).

Phonemic awareness instruction is the first basic skill to introduce children to early reading activities. It is very important at this stage that the young learners are taught, apart from being able to listen, to be conscious of what is happening to their various organs of speech. Simply put, learners should be instructed to observe what is happening within the mouth region as the instructor is trying to produce the sounds. One of the challenges being faced by teachers has to do with inability to distinguish between the speech sounds and the letters of the alphabets. Here, we are referring to sound- letter correspondence. This is because the 26 letters of the alphabets of English sounds are represented by 40- 44 sound segments, which could simply be interpreted to mean that some of the letters of the alphabets would have to stand for more than one sound. For example, the alphabet "a" in the word "apple", is represented by the short form of /ae/, whereas in word such as the past form of eat, that is, 'ate', the letter is represented by / e/ sound. Also the letters "ea", that is vowel digraph of English language in words such as ' read' ' meal', and ' real 'are represented by the long form of an / i:/ sound. This simply means that there is no one to one correspondence between the letters of the alphabets and the sounds of the English words. Other relevant examples are:

a ----- apple \_\_\_ ape

e-----egg \_\_\_\_\_ eagle

i----- itch \_\_\_\_\_ ice

u ----- up ----- unicorn

Each of the letters of alphabets of English language represents a sound or sound segments according to the rule of the language. Moats and Tolma (2009) confirm this position stressing that most teachers of reading even in the advanced countries of the world emphasise the teaching of the alphabetic without the full grasp of the function of the letters. Another difficulty often encountered by teachers and students learning to read is that there are some sounds of the English language representing spellings and some spellings representing sounds, (Moats & Tolman,2009). Thus, a student producing English words with heavy reliance on the surface appearance of the letters will find reading difficult. For example, the word 'six' is made up of three letters of the alphabets that is, 's', 'i' and 'x' but four sound segments /s/, /i/, /k/ and /s/ . So also, a word like 'ate' for example, is made up of three alphabets but only two sound segments /et/. This can simply be interpreted to mean that students as a matter of priority, first of all, be taught how to isolate the speech sounds of English language from the words and this has posed a lot of challenges to reading teachers and diagnosticians in reading as tersely stated below:



One of the daunting challenges that the teachers of reading is faced with is how to instruct the students on how to isolate the sounds of speech from the letter of the alphabets. It has also been reported that a child must first of all know how to isolate sounds from the words (Reading Rocket, 2012).

According to Adams, Forman, Lumberg & Beeler, (1998, para.2):

Research indicates that, without direct instructional support, phonemic awareness eludes roughly 25 percent of middle-class first graders and substantially more of those who come from less literacy-rich backgrounds. Furthermore, these children evidence serious difficulty in learning to read and write (see Adams, 1990, for a review)

Unfortunately, most of the African countries are made up of children who are from poor economic background and parents that are illiterates. This is because the teaching of reading at the level of phonemic awareness requires a lot of skills and experience, which can only be offered by professional reading experts skilled in this aspect of reading pedagogy. Thus children with poor backgrounds are at a very high disadvantage.

To crack the code of reading, Virginia Campbell, a kindergarten teacher in Texas, USA, offered the following suggestions,

-Teachers of reading must teach the students the connection between the sounds and letters in an acceptable order. This simply means that they must show to the learners how the sounds correspond to letters”.

- They must also strive to teach the initial, medial and the last sound of the letter.

-They must also teach the students to know how to break the word down into a sequence of sounds .This has to do with how to segment the word and thereafter blend them together to make them pronounceable.

-They must teach the students how to chop up string of sounds to a smooth sounding words. (Reading Rockets, 2012)

Spoken language is made up serially arranged sounds, which has been proved not to come by man naturally especially in second language situation. This smallest unit of sounds, otherwise referred to as phoneme would have to be taught before students can read at all. Thus, any teaching focusing on the instruction to show that language is made up of these small sound segments is referred to as phonemic awareness teaching. Corollary to the above assertion therefore, is the fact that, teaching centring on phonemic awareness is all about teaching the children to understand that the letters of the alphabets are standing for a particular sound and as such, teachers should start from instructing the learners to listen to, observe, watch and feel what the mouth is doing (Leyon,2012)

As a result of this, it has been stated by Hempenstall, (1999) that:

Over the last ten to twenty years there has been increasing consensus about reading success and failure. Reviews by Hurford, et al., 1993; and Mann, 1993 have noted that the presence or absence of phonemic awareness predicts the future membership of good/bad reader categories, and discriminates good readers from poor reader (para.1)



## Phonics.

According to Fitzroy Learning Network (2010),

'Phonics' comes from the Greek word, phone, meaning 'voice' or 'sound'. It therefore indicates a method of learning to read and write English that *concentrates on sounds*, or, to be more precise, the *sounds the letters make*. It is a method that uses the alphabet – and the sound each letter makes – as its cornerstone. This is to be contrasted to systems like the '**whole language method**' which ignore the letters and simply encourages students to learn each word in the English language as a whole, indivisible unit. Whole language methods are not interested in the sounds the letters make. (Phonics for Kids, para.1-2).

What is quite apparent from the quoted definition is the fact that each letter of the alphabet is representing a particular sound symbol and should not be perceived or, in a plain language, pronounced as letters. For example, the Fitzroy Method, being popularly used, that is (a! for apple, b! for ball, c! for cat) are examples of phonics method of teaching reading. The use of an exclamation mark as can be seen according to Fitzroy (2010), is an indication that the emphasis is on the sound that the letter makes. Thus, it is practically impossible to, for example, say 'cee, ay ,tee', which are the first letters for the word "cat" to have something awkward like "ceeaytee" This will completely bring about confusion of unimaginable proportion. Therefore, the phonics method of teaching clearly demarcates between sounds and spellings.

Corollary to the above is the fact that, words are arrived at by putting letter-sounds together contrary to letter name put together (Fitzroy, 2010). Thus, the start –off of the phonics method of teaching is instruction dealing with the ability of the students, to recognise the letters of the alphabets, referred to as alphabetic method. For example, as soon as the child is able to recognise the letter of the word "dog" and the sounds "d! o! g!" that go with the word, he or she should be able to decode ( read ) the word on sight. The most interesting aspect of this method of teaching reading is that as soon as a student is able to understand the sound segments of only 26 letters of the alphabets, the child is on his or her breakthrough to a variety of reading activities (Fitzroy, 2010).

Using the evidence provided by the main source of this information, phonics method of teaching reading, is not a new strategy of imparting early literacy, it is as old as (3500-3700 years), meaning that it is as old as the inception of letters of the alphabets. It has also been stressed by this same authority that teaching reading via the use of phonics methods may not be that simple because of the number of the sounds representing each of the letters of the alphabets (I stressed this while discussing phonemic awareness). To further compound this problem is the fact that, at times, some of these sounds have similar sound varieties, while quite a lot of them do not. For example, letter "c" in the word "cat" is realised as / k /. Also, are the problems of both the consonant and the vowel digraphs of the language. A digraph is simply the use of two letters to represent a single sound segment. For example, letters " th ,ch ea, ee" are consonant and vowel digraphs of the English language and they can be found at the initial and mid positions of the words such as " think", "church" "read" and "real" respectively. One of the problems of digraph is the fact that it produces quite diametrically opposed pronunciation to the original sound of the letter. For instance, digraphs, "sh" and "gh", alveolar fricative /s/ and glottal / h/ dramatically change to dental or alveolar fricative in words like " think" or " they" and digraph 'gh', that is made up of traditionally velar stop sound / g/ and glottal fricative / h/ is realised as labiodentals fricative / f/ in words such as "cough" and "rough". The digraph of the English language is said to be



made up of about 60 common ones (Fitzroy, 2010). This therefore poses a very serious challenge to young learners of the English language. A close examination of the examples below shows some of these digraphs and the letters they are associated with:

tea = t! + ea! ea-----digraph  
 spoon = s! + p! + oo! + n! oo-----digraph  
 freedom = f! + r! + ee! + d! o! m! ee-----digraph  
 smashing = s! + m! + a! + sh! + ing!----- sh digraph & extra sounds ing  
 discussion = d! + i! + s! + c! + u! + s! + sion ----- extra sounds ion ( Fitzroy ,2010,para. 14)

Before concluding on the concept of phonics, the submission of Pparents (2012) is also crucial to this study. According to this source:

Phonics is simply the system of relationships between letters and sounds in a language. When your kindergarten learns that the letter B has the sound of /b/ and your second-grader learns that “tion” sounds like /shun/, they are learning phonics Learning phonics will help your children learn to read and spell. Written language can be compared to a code, so knowing the sounds of letters and letter combinations will help your child decode words as he reads. Knowing phonics will also help your child know which letters to use as he writes words. (Reading and Language,para.2)

From the above definition, it is discovered that if care is not taken phonics can be confused with phonemic awareness. A clear cut distinction that has to be made between these concepts of reading is that while phonics deals with the relationship existing between letter and sound, phonemic awareness is all about the sound segments of a language. It is about the knowledge that a beginning reader has of the sounds of the various alphabetic letters that make up a word. Instruction having to do with the use of phonics to teach beginning reading often commences in the second grade of the child’s early education, during the stage referred to as the kindergarten when children are usually introduced to the concepts of the sounds of the various consonant letters . At this point of the child’s early education, all letters of the alphabets with the exception of the vowel letters (a,e,i,o, u) and the sounds that go with these letters are the primary focus of reading instruction at this stage (Pparents,2012). This instruction continues further by introducing the second graders to have the knowledge of all the sounds of the letters, how letters are combined to form words, and how the word parts can be broken into syllables. For example, the continuous tense of “ing”, the past, and the participle of the “ed”. At this stage, they are completely immersed into reading as well as engaging in the spelling of words that are associated with those letters. This is with a bid to introducing the skill of automaticity in reading that is, the ability to read smoothly and efficiently. The emphasis here, unlike phonemic awareness’ whose instruction is basically about the sound segments that go with the letters, the preoccupation at this stage emphasizes the ability to read the written word that the letters are representing. Based on The National Reading Panel’s findings and as reported by Pparents(2012), it has been discovered that the phonics method of teaching reading is very effective for teaching beginning reading. The outcome of the research on reading to assess the effectiveness of phonics method in the teaching of learning to read reveals that:

- Systematic and explicit phonics instruction that is direct and follows a particular sequence—is more effective than phonics instruction that is not systematic or no phonics instruction at all.
- Systematic, explicit phonics instruction is most effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade.
- Systematic, explicit phonics instruction improves children’s word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension skills.



- Systematic, explicit phonics instruction benefits all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- Systematic, explicit phonics instruction most benefits children who are having difficulty learning to read.(Reading and Language, para.7-8)

However, it has been reiterated by the same source that the phonics method of teaching reading is just one side of the coins as far as effective teaching of beginning reading is concerned. This is because complete and thorough teaching of beginning reading as a matter of fact, should also emphasize reading fluently, ability to develop the learner's vocabulary, and the most important essence of teaching reading, test comprehension. The synergy between Phonics instruction and phonemic instruction lies on the fact that the phonics method of teaching reading kicks –off from where phonemic awareness anchors the instruction regarding the teaching of reading at this early stage of the child's reading instruction.

Phonics has also been defined as:

a method for teaching reading and writing the English language by developing learners' phonemic awareness—the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes—in order to teach the correspondence between these sounds and the spelling patterns (graphemes that represent them)(Creative Common Attribution,2012 para.1)

The major preoccupation of phonics teaching is to assist the early readers to be able to decode words that he /she is not familiar with by saying them out audibly (decode). Another terminology for this is what has been referred to as blending (Creative Common Attribution, 2012). According to this source, 'since it focuses on the spoken and written units within words, phonics is a sub lexical approach and, as a result, is often contrasted with Whole language, a word-level-up philosophy for teaching reading'(para.2). This portends to mean that phonics is all about the words, that is the lexical elements of reading as against phonemic awareness whose focus is solely on the phonemes. The phonics method of teaching beginning reading is an amalgam of both the sounds and the spellings, technically referred to as graph- phonemes.

Right from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the use of phonics to teach the beginning reading has been enjoying a prime of place in early literacy teaching especially in the English language speaking environment, notably UK and Australia( Creative Common Attribution, 2012).

### **Basic rules of Phonics**

The basic rule of phonics includes the following:

#### 1. Cognitive Reading skills

- (a) Alphabetic principle
- (b) Vowel phonics patterns
- (c) Consonant phonics patterns

#### 2 Handling of sight words and high frequency words within phonics.

#### 3 Different phonics approaches.

- (a) Synthetics phonics





( b) Analytic phonics.( Creative Common Attribution, para.4-5)

For the purpose of time and space, efforts shall be devoted to only one of the aforementioned basics phonics rules that is, different phonics approaches - synthetic and the analytical phonics approaches. Wyse and Styles (2006) report that in the 1993, edition of Cambridge Journal of Education, edited by Mary Jane Drummond and Morag Styles titled: *The Politics of Reading*, a title that suggests the issue of politics and reading pedagogy (Wyse & Styles, 2006), the topical issue then was on the best method to teach reading in the beginning years of the child's life. A strong debate as to teaching reading either through "published schemes or by whole language approach, called the "real books" or "apprenticeship approach" was raised (Waterland, 1985, cited in Wyse & Styles, 2006, p.36). During this time, there were those who were of the opinion that synthetic phonics method of teaching the early reading was the most ideal. Notable among these strong advocates of Synthetics phonics method was Joyce Morris, who was of the view that the only way out of addressing imminent reading crises is by making use of this method. Reporting the American National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), this same source opines that synthetic phonics programmes are "those that emphasise teaching students to convert letter (graphemes) into sounds (phonemes) and to blend the sounds to form negotiable words" (p.37). Another form of phonics method of teaching strongly canvassed for is referred to as the analytic phonics, which has to do with the "larger unit phonics programmes, that introduce children to whole words before introducing them to analyse this into larger subparts, (i.e. onsets, rimes, phonogram's, spellings patterns as well as phonemes). The final nod for a return to phonics method of teaching reading was orchestrated by the Jim Rose Committee of 2005, set up by the House of Common in Education to review the situation of early reading pedagogy. This committee headed by Jim Rose strongly recommended a return to phonics method of reading (Wyse & Styles, 2006).

### **Using nonsense syllables to teach phonemic awareness and phonics reading**

Due to the intricate nature of how to effectively handle beginning reading, efforts have been devoted in search of suitable methods and strategies to upgrade the teaching of reading at the elementary stage of the child's life. One of this innovations has been the introduction of the concept of Nonsense syllable to complement the already existing methods of teaching reading at this delicate stage of the child's life. Interestingly, the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics method of teaching reading can be better enhanced by engaging in some forms of manipulation depending on the dexterity of the teacher. However, at the moment, I shall only concentrate on how to manipulate nonsense syllables to teach phonemic awareness as used during a workshop organised by the Ogun State Government, Nigeria to train the primary school teachers on how to effectively teach reading between September 2004- March, 2005. This researcher was one of the facilitators used by the Ogun State Government.

#### **Brief history of the concept.**

Ebbinghaus, a German Psychologist, pioneered the experimental study on memory tagged: "Discovery of the forgetting Curve". He began this study in 1879. This study, used by other scholars, such as Wundt, was also replicated by Donald Mackay in 1973, in his "Theory of Comprehension and Attention" Both Wilhelm Wundt and Herman Ebbinghaus were reported to be the early founding fathers of psychology (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopaedia).

According to the source just cited, nonsense syllable is a "pseudoword", meaning a unit of speech or text that appears like a real word but which in actual sense does not connote any



meaning. Syllables are phonological building blocks of words (Wikipedia, free Encyclopaedia). For example, the word 'computer', is made of three syllable words, "com-pu-ter".

In English Language, syllables are very important in that they greatly influence the rhythm of language. Syllables are thus crucial in the teaching and learning of reading, especially the early reading skill. Quite contrarily, the nonsense syllables of Ebbinghaus are different from the one just illustrated now based on the fact that although they are pronounceable, they do not make any meaning per se.

For example, the suffix, "pre", a syllable will connote "before", in the word "pre-existence", the model of nonsense syllable, simply because it is not grounded or established on the concept of prior-knowledge of the learner, has no such categorisation. Linguistically, pseudoword (another name for nonsense syllable), is defined as "respecting the phonotatic restriction of a language" (Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia 2012), meaning that it is pronounceable for speakers of the language. Ebbinghaus was thus pre-occupied with determining how higher mental processes could actually be studied via experimentation contrary to the belief at the time. To control for most potentially confounding variables, Ebbinghaus preferred to use simple acoustic maintenance rehearsal for which a list of words could have been used. Believing that learning can be influenced by prior knowledge and understanding, he preferred to use what could easily be memorised for his experiment. Because the scholar believed that easily formable word would not produce the expected result simply for being already rooted in prior knowledge, he used words that had no prior cognitive associations. Thus, he devised the means of nonsense syllable, also known as "cvc" triagram.

A nonsense syllable is thus a "consonant-vowel-consonant combination, where the consonant does not repeat and the syllable does not have prior meaning" (Wikipedia, free encyclopedia, 2012). For example, "CVC" BOL, sounds like ball and DOT (already a word) would not fit into his experiment. However, syllables such as, (DAX, BOK, YAK) are acceptable or suitable for his experiment although. Ebbinghaus was heavily criticised for failing to produce examples for his proposition. Today however, the concept of nonsense syllable has been taken beyond the consonant vowel pairing since syllables that are made up two letters can also be said to be pseudo word in as much as such syllables contain the verbal elements.

Despite this however, Ebbinghaus' theory of learning and memory can be applied to reading. For a would-be reader to make meaning out of the text being read, the domain of memory is crucial for recall and interpretation of the content being read. Looking at deciphering a text, we are dealing with the ability to sound out regular words (sometimes referred to as "word attack" skills). "Cipher Knowledge is demonstrated when a person appropriately sounds out word s/he has never seen before," as noted by Sebastian, (2000, p.34). Deciphering will inevitably assist in decoding. These two terms, that is, deciphering and decoding are often confused to mean the same thing, but in the real sense, they are not. Sebastian (2000, p.33) distinguished between the two as follows:

Deciphering and decoding is not the same thing – using spelling sounds knowledge about letters in the English Language to "sound out" words is deciphering. Pronouncing words correctly regardless of whether they are regular or irregular is decoding. If a child pronounced "steak" so it rhymed with "beak", the child will be deciphering the word not decoding it.

This simply means that even if deciphering is at the level of letter, it is the first step essential for sounding out words as stressed. To use nonsense words for teaching reading, all the teacher needs to do according to Sebastian (2000) is to "make up simple nonsense words,





and ask them to name them. Children who decipher words have no problem reading words like “hin”, “vab” or “lat”.

Flemming (1999) also confirmed that nonsense syllables are good for teaching multiple syllabic words after the learners might have mastered the basic phonic concepts such as common letter sounds and the behaviour of letter clusters. He advocated that after the teacher might have reviewed phonic rules with the learners, especially the behaviour of vowel and vowel pairs... they should use “nonsense syllables” that demonstrated phonic patterns such as “nad” and “bane” to access student skill with each concept. For example, imagine the use of the following nonsense syllables and the manner in which they can be used to teach various sound segments:

Bach ---- hoon---- mim---- rouk

Bape ----hoss ---- mong---- rouse

Beeg ---- kaze---- mool ---- sayz

Bep ---- kazz ---- mott ---- seeg

Bool ---- kig----- peem----- soge

Doke ---- pite ---- sote ----- tat (Findlen & Christian,2001,p.22)

From the above, various sound segments can be taught, for instance, the vowel and consonant digraphs as seen in these nonsense syllables can undergo various sounds transformation and so, they can be used to teach pronunciation and listening skills which are very crucial to becoming effective reader. Another important thing to be noticed above is the fact that, as the child learns to say each of the nonsense syllables or pseudo words above, their organs of articulation are being adjusted to smoothly and effortlessly make the sounds without difficulty, preparing the child for real reading. Thus, when a child is able to articulate the sound variants of the digraphs ( ch, oo, ee, ou,ng) as can be seen in the nonsense syllables, they would not pose any challenge to them coming across them when reading for meaning. The same goes for the single letters such as ( b, k, g, t etc ) above. Of particular interest is also the letter “ e”, used as either as soft or short “ e” looking at the above nonsense words. Nonsense syllables can be used to simplify the pronunciation of consonant clusters. When two consonants are paired side by side, then there is what is referred to as consonant cluster. Most of the time articulating cluster of consonants could be difficult for beginning readers, and to ease the tension that the teachers and the students are likely to face with, nonsense syllable containing cluster of consonants can be used. For example, a child can be asked to pronounce the following : “tra”, “spri” “ski” “ska” “scru”, “spli”, “stru”, “ bra”, “ast”, “lasp”

As the child plays around these cluster of consonants nonsense syllables with his or her linguistic organs, pronunciation is made simpler and coming across the segments of these cluster while reading will not pose any serious threat any more.

Nonsense syllable can be used to reduce the difficulty that the beginning readers are likely to have as a result of over generalising some sounds. For example, in these nonsense syllables,

‘din’, ‘gag’, ‘cak,’ etc, student should be told that the silent “e”that can be introduced to the last letter of the syllables to transform the syllables to words is pronounced silently so that the word, “ dine” should not be realised as “dini’, making use of the short front vowel / i/ sound.



Lastly, to ease pronunciations' difficulty, some words can be broken into segments and blended. For instance, the word, "excel" can be segmented to: ex + cel = excel, ex + cept= except or ac +cept= accept respectively. It is of interest to note that, "cel", "cept" are nonsense syllables. Whenever a child is asked to say, " a----- cept," , " ex-----cel", etc .The child is segmenting and at the same time blending to facilitate word attack skill.

Let us imagine the sense in placing the following words and nonsense syllables side by side to ease the teaching of reading:

Nonsense words _____	real words
Tit _____	teeth
tet _____	Tap
blem _____	blemish
geg _____	egg
tas _____	sat

Audibly, one can perceive the variation in the above sounds as the learner changes from the short / i/ to long form represented by the vowel digraph "ee" of the real word above. Also, one can notice the difference in the articulation of the short /e/ sound in letter "e" in "tet" pseudo word and the short /ae/ sound in letter "a". From the pseudo word " blem", as can be seen a letter of the alphabet " l" realised as short / i/ sound also accommodates consonant digraph, " sh" , realised as palato -alveolar voiceless fricative sound /ʃ/ .

Also, words can be segmented to have two nonsense syllables pairing to teach pronunciation, for example:

CV nonsense syllables -----	VCV Nonsense syllables -----	Real words.
Mo -----	ped -----	moped
Vo -----	ted -----	voted
Ba -----	ked -----	baked

In the examples provided, the teacher of reading must ensure that the students pay attention to the sound segments as they undergo different aural-oral transformation. They should be taught to focus on the sound within the words, break the words down into sequence of words and blend them together for smooth pronunciation.

**Personal experience of the researcher**

As a stakeholder in the education sector in Nigeria, the researcher can testify to the importance of nonsense syllables at teaching the beginners. As one of the facilitators used to prepare Ogun State teachers in Nigeria in September, 2005, during a workshop organised for the primary school teachers by the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Tai Solarin University of Education, (TASUED) Ijebu-Ode Nigeria, instruction on the use of nonsense syllables was part of our focus and this researcher used it to handle one of the sections and it was adjudged to be useful by the participants. We employed the use of various strategies and activities to ensure that the participating primary school teachers understood how to use this technique of teaching effectively. Series of nonsense syllables were written on cardboards for their viewing and were made to produce the sounds and to



take note of what happened to their organs of speech as they tried to produce the sounds involved in the syllables.

Also, flashcards in which different types of nonsense syllables and words aligned with them written were shown so that they can blend these pseudo words to form meaningful words. Those handling the lowest level of the primary schools were told to de-emphasise the teaching of reading for meaning at that stage since most of the pseudo words turned real words during the workshop were words that the students must have heard either from their parents or through any medium of communication as a result of their prior knowledge. The belief was that they probably must have used several thousands of words at homes which they have not come across before. We combined tongue twisting group of sentences with nonsense words. They were told for example, to observe, the ingenuity involved in nursery tongue- twisting of the common " PETER PIPER PICKS A PECK OF PICKLE PEPPER. A PECK OF PICKLE PEPPER PETER PIPER PICKS," noticing the sounds of / p/ and / k/ as the words were also reduced to pseudo words in "pet in peter", pip in piper", with the final syllables in the two words becoming unstressed schwa sounds. We also segmented "pic and kle as well as pe and pper". We made them to understand the importance of making use of songs such as the popular " HIPPOPOTAMUS" as in

H-i-p for the hip

P-o-p –p-o for the hipopo and,

T-a-m-u-s for the hippopotamus.

The "po" and "tamus" in this beautiful nursery song are examples of nonsense syllables segmented to ease the pronunciation of the long words. Participating teachers were made to understand this. These and several other uses of nonsense syllables showing the teaching of phonemic awareness were used. One quick question that a critical mind is likely to ask is what is the relevance of all these efforts? Why exploring the world of beginning reading or learning to read in this study, more importantly, that reading to learn has been deemphasised in this study. A quick response to this quest is that under achievement in reading is at the foundation level, hence, it has to be tackled via variety of methods and skills to inculcate in the learners long lasting reading ability.

Secondly, it may also interest the reader(s) that some primary school teachers have not fully mastered the skill of reading let alone knowing how to teach it. The researcher remembers an experience in one of the workshop sections facilitated. A sentence, "it is interesting" was written on the chalk board for one of the participants to read out, but instead of saying "interesting", the participant could not pronounce the word, choosing rather to say "interested". The facilitator wrote the word on a sheet of paper to ascertain whether the woman had sight problem, gave her the sentence to read again but she repeated the same thing to the chagrin of her colleagues. This is the appalling situation we are confronted with.

Another example was an 18 year damsel, who came to resist for her Senior Secondary Certificate Examination after graduating from one school. After several unsuccessful attempts to read a passage from a Junior Secondary School Textbook on English Language, she was confined to the J.S.S two, starting all over again. What is being stressed here is that reading deficiency can be traced to the cradle and Herman Ebbinghau's Nonsense Syllable Theory could be one of the best strategies that the teachers can employ to handle this deficiency.

## **Conclusion**



Teaching elementary reading could be a frustrating and an arduous task experience especially if the teachers are not saddled with relevant teaching skills essential for its teaching. The reason being that like every other skill, the teaching and learning of reading, has experienced teaching revolution and as stakeholders in the education industry we must not fold our hands while the teaching and learning of reading is experiencing a sharp decline, especially in the African setting.

### **Recommendations**

Relying on the yesteryears experience to handle the teaching of elementary reading may not help as expected. Since teaching reading at this level is a sine-qua-none to the child's latter academic challenges, teachers saddled with this responsibility must strive to use various methods that can help to boost the child's optimum achievement in reading. Apart from the use of the technique discussed here, eclectic method is equally very relevant in the teaching as teachers know the methods that best suited them. Teachers must avail themselves of the opportunity of equipping and updating their knowledge. The government, private organisations, parents and all that are involved at this level of imparting knowledge must encourage the teachers and sponsor them for in-service programmes so that they can be more effective

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