Influence of English Proficiency on Junior Secondary School Achievement in Social Studies in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study investigated the influence of English proficiency on Junior Secondary School Achievement in Social Studies in Osun State, Nigeria. The research was a correlational type. The population for this study consisted of all the Junior Secondary Schools in Osun State, Nigeria. A total number of 100 students were randomly selected from two public Junior secondary Schools in Ife East Local Government that comprises 50 students in each of the schools. Data were collected with two set of questionnaires administered on the 100 students that were sampled for the study. The first set of questionnaire was on "English Language Proficiency Test" (ELPT) and the second set of the questionnaire was on "Social Studies Achievement Test" (SSAT). Two hypotheses were generated for the study and were tested using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistical method at 0.05 level of significant. The results showed that language proficiency were significantly related to the achievement in Social Studies. Thus, it was recommended that English language skills should be handled with high priorities by teachers and also that government should encourage the teaching of English language skills in our schools by providing adequate support or resources.*

Keywords: English Language, Proficiency, Junior Secondary School, Achievement and Social Studies

1. Introduction

Language is a vital tool for the unity of a society. It does not only integrate inhabitants of the society, but also gives them an identity. Emenayo (2002) sees language as an instrument for communication; a symbol of social identity and an emblem of group membership and solidarity. Also, language is culture bound that is, a language is a product of a particular culture which serves as an underlying factor in the determination of words and the meaning given to such words in that particular language. Therefore, in the education of an individual, language concerns the influence of social life and social relationships on the development of personality. The whole process of education is the interaction of individuals and social groups, with certain ends in view (called the aims of education) for the development of the individual and the community at large (Ottaway, 1962).

The concept of language in the intellectual development of man cannot be overemphasized. It is an indispensable tool for learners to survive within the learning environment. It is a complex mental and physiological process through which ideas and feelings are communicated and expressed by means of a system of sounds and sound symbols. Bollinger (1968) was of the view that language is a system of vocal auditory communication using conventional signs composed of arbitrary patterned sound units and assembled according to set when interacting with the experience of its users. Man's ability to acquire language through the natural Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and use it to communicate is what differentiates him from other animals (Chomsky, 1965). In Africa alone, there are over one thousand languages and Nigeria is estimated to have about four hundred indigenous languages (Bamigbose, 1976).

The Nigerian government, in recognizing the importance of language, enacted a language policy included and documented in the National Policy on Education thus: Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting sound interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (FRN, 2004). Although a lot have been said and done about the likely reasons for the falling standard of performance in internal and external examinations in secondary schools; a more pertinent issue is the lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, which is English language in Nigeria. English language is the language used in teaching all subjects in the secondary schools and the language with which students write their final papers in internal and external examinations. This makes English language play a significant role in the Nigerian educations sector. The question that now readily comes to mind is – Are students performing brilliantly well in this foreign language used as language of instruction?

Obemeata (1988) opined that many developing countries are in search of a language policy because it is believed that an appropriate language of instruction would ensure efficient teaching and learning. Let us therefore see how much has been taught and learnt in English language in the last two decades in Nigeria.

Ayodele (2001) compared the results in English language in two examinations i.e. (May / June and Nov/Dec WASCE (1990 - 1996), with that of 1981 – 1986). He found that the same general trend of poor performance pervades throughout the various years. Ayodele (2001) went further to confirm if other countries where English is also considered as second language, and in particular other countries taking same or similar examination with Nigeria. In his comparison, he found that the percentage of Nigerian candidates ending up in good passes in the English language paper was lower than what was obtained in other West African countries. He also concluded that success rate tends to be higher (and conversely failure rate tends to be lower) in countries where the number of candidates are fewer. It therefore appears that Nigeria with far more candidates than others tend to score a much lower success rate and a much higher failure.

This view of English language deficiency is substantiated by a study of the problems of intelligence testing in Nigeria by Obemeata (1971). He interviewed pupils who did tests ML and MQ of the Australian council for Educational Research higher test. He concluded that the problem of language was probably the most important factor influencing test scores, and affecting the predictive validity of tests intelligence. He identified two reasons for the language problem which Nigerian testees encounter in tests of intelligence. The first is partial language deficiency or lack of proficiency in English language; and the second is that the structure of ones' language affects ones thought process.

Ayodele (1984) came up with the following conclusions from various studies that he carried out on performances of students in English language in Nigeria;

i. Students performed better in letter or essays than in comprehension and summary work;
ii. Not a few students ended up with an outright zero score in comprehension and summary, whereas most students would earn at least some marks in essay / letter writings;
iii. That students are poor readers in Nigeria, apart from this, they do not cultivate the habit of reading on their own.

Adegbile (1999), Adelabu (1988), Adepoju (1999), Adeyemi (2010), Adeyemi (2009) and Itsuokor (1987) carried out series of instructional methods to enhance comprehension skills and proficiency in English language and they found that performances of students improved tremendously. A lot of researches have been carried out on the influence of English language on other subjects other than Social Studies and on how English language could be better taught in secondary schools in Nigeria, but there is hardly any investigation carried out on effects of English language proficiency on achievement in social studies. This study therefore sought to investigate the effects of English language proficiency on achievement in social studies.

2. Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the problem stated earlier, these two hypotheses were generated:

Ho_1:   There is no significant correlation between improved comprehension in English language and achievement in Social Studies.

Ho_2:   There is no significant correlation between improved English language vocabulary and achievement in Social Studies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sample

The target population for the study was the entire Junior Secondary School students of all the secondary schools in Osun State, Nigeria. The choice of this category of students was considered appropriate because at this level, it is expected that the students should have acquired sufficient command of the English language that will enable them hold their own for a good performance in the final Junior Secondary School examinations. Two secondary schools were randomly selected from Ife east local Government of Osun State, Nigeria and a sample of 100 students (50 in each school) were randomly sampled, through random sampling technique. Most of the students lived in the cultural environment of their first language and the local government area from which the subjects were selected can be found in the large and most urban town in the locality.

3.2 Instrumentation

The instruments for this study were 2 sets of questionnaires; the first set was on "English Language Proficiency Test" (ELPT). The test was constructed by the researchers. The test contains two parts. Part 1 consists of 30 vocabulary questions and students were made to choose from among four options lettered A, B, C and D. Part 2 contains two comprehension passages that examined an aspect of reading comprehension skills such as the literal, interpretive and critical comprehension skills. Fifteen (15) questions were drawn from each of the two passages and a total of 45 comprehension questions were then drawn.

The English language proficiency test (ELPT) therefore contained 85 questions (40 vocabulary and 45 comprehension questions) at the initial stage. These 85 items were subjected to validity and reliability indices and eventually 64 items withstood the test of time with the reliability index of 0.81 comprising 30 vocabulary and 34 comprehension questions.

The second questionnaire consists of 100 objective questions in four topics on Social studies. The questionnaire was equally subjected to validity and reliability indexes and eventually 60 items withstood the test of time and the reliability index was 0.76. The two sets of questionnaire were personally administered by the researchers to 100 respondents and one hundred percent rate of return was obtained.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses generated for this study, Canonical Correlation Coefficient was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 significant levels. This was because we measured correlation between two sets of variables.

4. Results

The findings of the study are presented in Tables I and II below:

Ho$_1$:　　There is no significant correlation between improved comprehension in English language and achievement in Social Studies.

Table 1: Relationship Between Improved Comprehension in English Language and Achievement in Social Studies.

Variables	N	X	SD	r	Remark
Improved comprehension in English Language	100	14.26	5.38	0.98	Significant
Achievement in Social Studies	100	36.18	8.95		

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.98, which depicts a significant relationship between these two variables. The correlation coefficient of 0.98 indicates that the measure used for prediction has about 75 per cent variance in common with the achievement being predicted. Consequently, a positive relationship is indicated. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Ho$_2$:　　There is no significant relationship between improved English language vocabulary and achievement in Social Studies.

Table 2: Relationship Between Improved English Language Vocabulary and Achievement in Social Studies.

Variables	N	X	SD	r	Remark
Improved English Language Vocabulary	100	7.20	6.73		
Achievement in Social Studies	100	4.60	2.10	0.98	Significant

Table II above shows a correlation coefficient of 0.98 which indicates a significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation coefficient of 0.98 indicates that the measure used for prediction has about 75 per cent variance in common with the achievement being predicted. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

5. Discussion of Findings

The overall results of the study showed that the two hypotheses generated and tested were rejected. In the first place, the results showed that there is a significant relationship between improved comprehension in English language and achievement in Social Studies. The correlation coefficient of 0.98 indicates that the measure used for prediction has about 75 per cent variance in common with the achievement being predicted. Thus, improved comprehension in English language will enhance high achievement in Social Studies.

　　Also, the result in Table II shows that there was a significant relationship between improved English language vocabulary and achievement in Social Studies. The correlation coefficient of 0.97 indicates that the measure used for prediction has about 75 per cent variance in common with the achievement being predicted. Thus, it can be concluded that improved English language vocabulary is capable of enhancing high achievement in Social Studies. This study therefore tallied with Obemeata (1971, 1988), Ayodele (1984, 2001), Adegbile (1999), Adelabu (1998), Adepoju (1998) and Itsuokor (1987) who were of the view that enhancing comprehension skill and proficiency in English language are determinants of students′ performances in various disciplines.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it was concluded that improvement in English language comprehension and improved English language vocabulary relate positively to achievement in Social Studies.

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are considered relevant:

i. English language as a medium of expression should be carefully taught by good teachers of English language.

ii. The four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be given equal teaching attention as discrete areas.

iii. There is a need for government to consider an urgent review of training and retraining of teachers of English language to update their knowledge with the demands of our new age.

iv. Since proficiency in the use of eclectic approach would naturally be expected to offer the best results, academics should be greatly assisted to acquire such proficiency. Meeting the challenges would be greatly facilitated by joint efforts of government and relevant subject associations.

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