

An Assessment of Secondary School Teachers' Knowledge of Proverb in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p277

Abstract

Proverbs are an aspect of culture cherished all over the world and preserved in language which is the medium for expressing them. Also, proverbs have psychological, cosmological and socio-cultural roots. They make special demands from the decoder, as their interpretations usually require more than sheer linguistic processing. The philosophical and didactic implications of proverbs make them quite useful for the teaching of, especially language, at any level of education. However, many factors, including teacher knowledge could affect the use of proverbs in the teaching-learning process. Thus, a study was carried out to find out if teachers of the English Language in Secondary Schools in Ilorin, Nigeria possessed any knowledge of proverbs, and whether their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) reflected some teacher and school-related variables. The study involved 120 teachers randomly selected from 30 secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. A researcher designed instrument comprising two sections (the one seeking demographic information, and the other, a test of proverbs) was administered to the subjects for the study. Frequency count and percentage were used in answering the four research questions posed for the study. It was found that teachers had knowledge varied on the bases of gender, qualification and experience. Based on the findings, recommendations and suggestions were made.

Keywords: Assessment, Knowledge, Proverb.

1. Introduction

Language is a vital tool for intellectual growth and development. As mother tongue (MT), language is possessed unconsciously, with no need of teacher. When contacted from a second position, language may become a great problem for man. Most Nigerians contact English from such position - the literature has offered so much concerning the status and role of the English Language in Nigeria, especially in education which is the focus of this paper (Babatunde, 2001; Obafemi, 2007). However, in spite of the dominance enjoyed by the language in the nation's school system, performance in it has remained worrisomely poor.

In the quest to improve learner performances, a lot of teaching strategies and tactics have been suggested, one of which is the use of local forms in the ESL classroom. Lawal (1995) and Olajide (2006; 2010) specifically canvassed the use of proverbs in language teaching learning. They reasoned that proverbs, being stably rooted in the world of the language learner, would motivate and stimulate him. However, Olajide wondered how much knowledge of proverbs the teachers of English, particularly at the secondary school level possess to make them employ the forms rewardingly.

Knowledge itself has an intricate nature and its acquisition and dissemination cannot be haphazard (Abimbola, 2009). It can also weaken and/or atrophy if not updated, and enhanced.

There are different ways the teacher (and interested others) can acquire the knowledge of proverb, such as by formal or informal interactions with experts in a given language and its literature, sheer perseverance, consultation with elders who have proven knowledge of proverbs (folklore), and reading relevant literature intensively and intensively. And the teacher's use of the proverbs may vary along such teacher factors as gender, qualification, job experience and context of practice. A proper understanding of teachers' access to, and use of proverbs could go a long way to enhance English language teaching learning.

Theoretical Background

Proverbs are a repository of wisdom that emerges through generations of people that have based their verbal reactions on keen observations of social, political and cultural events. Lawal, Ajayi and Raji (1995) view proverbs as ‘... people’s collective wisdom sustained and transmitted from generation to generation’ (p.635). The linguistic, psychological and philosophical fireworks in proverbs make them a great instrument of behavioural control. However, an individual without relevant socio-cultural exposure cannot deploy proverbs correctly.

Language is the medium for transacting proverb - there is hardly a language without a set of proverbs. And from language to language, there are cultural precepts for the deployment of proverbs. For example, Lawal et al. (1995) described the situation with proverb usage among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. According to them, there are social conditions guiding the use of proverbs: a young man may require the approval of elders to use proverbs while in the midst of such elders; and the elders would condescend by using an appropriate proverb in return.

However, the dominance of a foreign language (such as the English language enjoys in Nigeria) can constitute a great threat to the development and use of proverbs. The problem gets compounded if the literature of the native language cannot thrive either because of linguistic imperialism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004; Adeyemi, 2006; Obafemi, 2006; Lawal, 2007.) or because of the absence of orthography - language gets stronger when it has its own system of writing. By that, the language could evolve an enduring literary base that has didactic applications (Lawal et al. 1995; Olajide 2006 & 2010).

Research evidence abounds to show that the more versatile you are in your mother tongue, the more creative you become in your thoughts. Language and thinking are so connected that it would only be theoretically easy to separate them (Olajide, 2004; 2007). One way to make thought true to life is by backing the thought with appropriate allusions and illustrations. The individual endowed to deploy proverbs correctly stands to communicate better, and would do this most conveniently drawing from the socio-psychological, cultural and cosmological materials that the mother tongue would have offered him as he grew up in his (or some other) community.

The implication of all these is that even if one relishes proverbs, one may not find them easy to give if one lacks the linguistic competence and cosmological insight required. Certain scholars (Osundare 1995, Adeyemi 2006 & Obafemi 2006) see danger in the use of foreign languages to write African literature. Their fears have been hinged on the fact that those foreign languages may not be able to reflect and sustain the rich socio-cultural and cosmological aspects of the African experiences. Oladipo (1995) has specifically warned that Western languages may not be able to give the correct interpretations of African world-views.

However, the experiences with the writings of Africans like Amos Tutuola, (Delano,1976) and Chinua Achebe, as observed by Oyeleye (1995), would seem to show that foreign languages may still be used to showcase such African anthropological and philosophical experiences as contained in proverbs. The foreign languages could still be used to present proverbs so effectively that the proverbs enhance learning.

It means that at a period like this, when Nigeria is trying to domesticate the English language and ensure that the language is, at the same time, used to greater international intelligibility, teachers of English could meaningfully incorporate proverbs in their classrooms. Proverbs that reflect the learners’ world-view, even if couched in the target foreign language, could promote learning and be considerably refreshing.

Problems and Purpose of the Study

The problem of this study stems from the dilemma created by the neglect of proverbs in the general education process in Nigeria, whereas there is sufficient scholarly urge that proverbs could promote language teaching-learning. It is also not clear whether teachers in the secondary schools in the country are sufficiently familiar with proverbs. No matter how useful proverbs may be, the teacher who has no (or limited) knowledge of them cannot deploy them in his classroom. Students, especially of English Studies (Language and Literature) fail year in year out, in spite of the huge funds the nation expends on education. Even if such teachers possess adequate knowledge of proverbs, it is not certain if they all can employ them regularly in their teaching tasks without such teacher variables as gender, attitude, qualification and experience not impacting negatively on their performance.

Thus, the general purpose of this study was to determine secondary school teachers’ knowledge of proverbs in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out if male secondary school teachers of English possessed knowledge of proverb at all.
2. Find out if teachers’ knowledge of proverb varied according to gender.
3. Determine if secondary school teachers’ knowledge of proverb differed to reflect qualification.

4. Find out if the knowledge of proverb possessed by secondary school teachers varied on the basis of job experience

Methodology

The study involved 120 teachers of English randomly selected from 30 secondary schools. The schools had also been randomly selected on account of who owned them - 15 private and 15 public. Two Male and two Female teachers were purposively selected. In selecting the teachers, however, their qualifications and experience on the job could not be reflected by randomization because such variables varied across schools.

A researcher designed, structured instrument comprising a test of proverbs was administered on the subjects. The first part (section A) of the instrument sought demographic information (such as gender, qualification, subject taught, and length of service) from the respondents. Section B presented 50 uncompleted proverbs that each respondent was required to complete within 25 minutes. Each tests item was most adequately interpreted in only one of the options lettered A-D.

The instrument had been validated in a fairly rigorous process involving the researchers' colleagues and a sample of 24 teachers selected from six secondary schools. The researcher's colleagues had helped to critique the instrument, although the proverbs involved had all been sourced from Delano (1976) which had been a respectable English translation of Yoruba proverbs, Yoruba being the predominant language spoken in Ilorin. The instrument was later trial-tested on 24 subjects randomly selected from six secondary schools in Omu-Aran, a town fairly far from Ilorin but within the same State. The pilot data were subjected to test-retest of a two week interval. Using the Pearson's product moment statistic to process the data, a co-efficient of 0.73 had been obtained for the instrument. The co-efficient led to the assumption that the instrument was not only valid but also reliable.

The four questions posed for the study were answered by relying on the results of the application the percentage in processing the relevant data.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the level of secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverb in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. Is there difference in secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverb to reflect teacher gender?
3. Does secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverb differ on the basis of the qualifications held by teachers?
4. Is there difference in the knowledge of proverb possessed by experienced and less- experienced secondary school teachers?

Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender, Qualification, and Experience

No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender		
	Male	60	50
	Female	60	50
2.	Qualification		
	Qualified	72	60
	Non-qualified	48	40
3.	Experienced		
	Experienced	89	74
	Less Experienced	31	26

Answering the Research Questions

The following are answers to the questions for the study

1.1 *Research Question 1: What is the level of secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverbs in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria?*

Table 1, above, shows the distribution of respondents by gender, qualification and experience. There were 60 male and 60 female teachers, each group constituting 50% of the total sample. Also, there were 72 qualified teachers, constituting 60% of the sample, and 48 unqualified teachers that formed 40%. In the experience row, it could be seen that there were 89 experienced and 31 less experienced teachers, constituting 74% and 26% of the total sample respectively.

Table 2: Teachers' General Level of Knowledge of Proverbs

Variable	Knowledge			Total
	High	Average	Low	
Proverbs	23 (19.16%)	30 (25%)	67 (55.83%)	120

1.2 *Research Question 2: Is there difference in secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverbs to reflect teacher gender?*

From Table 2, it may be seen that only 23, constituting 19.16%, of the total sample of 120 showed high knowledge of proverb. Thirty (30) subjects, representing 25% of the sample, showed average knowledge, while majority (67 that represented 55.8%) of the subjects had low knowledge of proverb. Knowledge was considered to be high if a subject scored up to 60% on the test of proverb; it was average when the subject scored up to 50%; and a score lower than 50% was rated as low

Table 3: Secondary School Teachers' Knowledge of Proverbs Taking Gender into Consideration.

Gender	Knowledge			Total
	High	Average	Low	
Male	13 (21.6%)	13 (10.8%)	34 (56.66%)	60
Female	10 (16.66%)	17 (28.33%)	33 (55%)	60

1.3 *Research Question 3: Does secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverbs differ on the basis of the qualifications held by teachers?*

Table 3 reveals that male and female teachers showed different levels of knowledge of proverb. While 13 (21.6%) males demonstrated high knowledge, only 10 (16.7%) females showed such level. On the Average scale were 13 males (10.8%) and 17 females (28.33%). From this analysis it may be inferred that more of female than male teachers in the sample possessed average knowledge of proverbs. Low knowledge was shown by 34 (56.6%) of males and 33 (55%) of females. The table shows that teachers, regardless of gender, generally had low knowledge of proverbs.

Table 4: Level of Secondary School Teachers' Knowledge of Proverbs Going by Qualification.

Qualification	Knowledge			Total
	High	Average	Low	
Qualified	21 (29.16%)	24 (33.33%)	27 (37.5%)	72
Non-Qualified	13 (27.08%)	13 (27.08%)	22 (45.83%)	58

As can be seen in Table 4, 21 qualified (29.16%) and 13 unqualified (27.08) teachers scored high on the test, irrespective of qualification. Also 24 (33.33%) of qualified and 13 (27.08%) of unqualified teachers had average knowledge of proverbs. While 27 (37.5%) of all the 72 qualified teachers showed low knowledge of proverbs, 22 (45.8%) of the unqualified had low knowledge. This shows that more of unqualified teachers showed less knowledge of proverbs.

1.4 *Research Question 4: Is there difference in the knowledge of proverb possessed by experienced and less experienced secondary school teachers.*

Table 5: Level of Experienced and Less - Experienced Secondary School Teachers' Knowledge of Proverb in Ilorin.

Experience	Knowledge			Total
	High	Average	Low	
Experienced	26 (33.33%)	28 (35.95%)	24 (30.77%)	78
Less-experienced	13 (30.95%)	15 (35.7%)	14 (33.33%)	42

Table 5 shows that there were more of experienced than less-experienced teachers in the sample (78 and 42 respectively). While 33.33% of the experienced teachers showed high knowledge of proverb, only 30.95% of the less-experienced did. Also, 35.95% of the experienced and 35.7% of the less-experienced were of average knowledge. On the Low scale, there were 30.77% of the experienced and 33.33% of the less-experienced. The analysis showed that in spite of the fact that the experienced teachers were in a larger number, they possessed more knowledge than their less-experienced counterparts. In other word, there was a difference in experienced and less-experienced secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverbs.

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The following are the findings of this study.

1. Secondary school teachers possessed knowledge of proverb.
2. However, there was difference in teachers' knowledge of proverb on the basis of gender, generally in favour of males.
3. Also, more of qualified than unqualified teachers possessed knowledge of proverb.
4. There was difference in experienced and less - experienced secondary school teachers' knowledge of proverb.

The findings of the study showed that in spite of the fact that all the teachers involved in the study were Yoruba and that the test of proverb administered to them were rooted in Yoruba cosmology and philosophy, majority of them did not have good knowledge of proverbs. That the proverbs were presented to them in English, the subject they professed to teach, should have been an advantage for them, more so as the source of the proverbs (Delano 1976) has tried to bring the English he has used very close to Yoruba in order to preserve the cultural flavour and world view in the proverbs. This situation suggests that such teachers may not be able to use proverbs to appreciable classroom advantages as admonished by Lawal et al. (1995) and Olajide (2006; 2010).

The finding that more of male possess the knowledge of proverb seems to contradict the view that females have relative advantages over males in language matters (Eccles, Frome, Yoon, Freedman-Doan, & Jacobs, 2000). Proverbs are a linguistic phenomenon, and going by the gender theory, one would expect the females involved in this study to have demonstrated better knowledge of proverbs.

It was also found in this study that knowledge of proverb differs along qualification: qualified teachers had generally better knowledge of proverbs than less-qualified teachers. The findings have puzzled this researcher as no known literature has linked qualification with cultural awareness. However, it is possible that the sample for this study comprised subjects who had either taken courses in Yoruba Language and Literature or enjoyed some exposures to considerable proverb usage in non formal contexts.

It was found that more of experienced teachers showed high knowledge of proverbs than less-experienced one. The situation could be due to the assumption that the older you are, the deeper your thoughts become on cultural matters, and the more you appreciate the philosophy of life as usually espoused in proverbs. Lawal et al. (1995) implicated age in man's disposition to the use of proverbs. According to them, elders are regarded as the better source of proverbs than the young ones. That is why a young person will seek the permission of an elder before deploying proverb in any conversation between them. The less-experienced teachers may also get seasoned over time in matters of proverbs. Besides, the finding has the tendency to suggest that the older generation of language educators in the state had better access to proverb-related facilities either in the general socio-cultural context or while they were on their training schemes.

Concluding Remarks

Proverbs have philosophical, cultural, psychological and linguistic roots. They are used in every society. Proverbs seem to have an enduring nature; they hardly change through time. They are useful for enlivening conversation, enriching

knowledge and generating wisdom. The very many advantages in proverbs make critics, educators and general observers to suggest that proverbs be protected, promoted and used in all spheres of life, particularly in Education. It can help especially language teaching – learning. From the findings of this study, however, teachers at the secondary school level seem to have much work to do in order to take full pedagogic advantages in proverbs.

The findings and discussions of this study are by no means exhaustive. Some of the inferences drawn could be upturned if more rigorous statistical tools, such as the t-test were applied in testing the data based on a set of hypotheses that the present study ignored. Also, the population and sample for the study may be enlarged for more reliable findings.

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