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A comparative study of Reading Achievement in First and Second Language Learners

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Abstract

Achievement in the languages, especially English and the mother tongue, is one of the areas of focus of the National Policy on Education. Of importance in this area is how students read prose materials in the languages. This area of importance has unfortunately enjoyed very little research attention. This study compared the achievement levels of one hundred and twenty randomly selected students in reading prose materials written in English and Yoruba (an indigenous language.) The results showed that students in the sample were more proficient in reading English prose materials than reading Yoruba prose materials. $t(118) = 24.25$; $P < 0.01$ It was also found that students with high SES background recorded the highest mean scores in both reading proficiency and comprehension in both languages (English 7.67 and 6.36; Yoruba 2.81 and 4.52). The implications of the findings of the study for teacher education and the teaching of English and mother tongue in second language situations are drawn.

For several years now educationists and researchers have reacted to the poor performance of students in English language and the indigenous languages (Ayodele 1985, Odey 2002, Okebukola 1994). In some instances the outcry is directed at the teachers and students, at other times government receives the vitriolic attacks. One thing that can be said about this contentious debate is the discovery that reading is adjudged important. (Okebukola 2004).

Reading in the language class, be it the native language or English is aimed at promoting understanding of written text, not only in the language being studied but also in other school subjects. From the nursery school to the university, reading is an essential component of language learning. Essentially, reading can either be undertaken silently or voiced (loud reading). The latter is a characteristic feature of language classes from the nursery to the senior secondary school. In both cases, the level of comprehension of the issues or ideas in the text that has been read is usually assessed after reading time has elapsed. In the case of loud reading the reader's pronunciation ability including stress and intonation patterns is assessed.

This paper is a report of a comparative study of reading achievement in English and Yoruba. A major source of debate among reading theorists is whether reading a foreign language is like reading in the mother tongue, that is to say, whether a person who is a 'good reader' in his / her first language will be a good reader in a simultaneously / subsequently acquired second language. The reading universal hypothesis put forward by Goodman (1973) claims that the reading process is substantially the same for all languages thus suggesting that a good first language (L1) reader will be a good second language (L2) reader. Yet Unoh (1989) found that Yoruba – English bilinguals read more slowly in their L1 – a situation attributed to the fact that Yoruba is a tonal language.

There are three major indigenous languages recognized as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004). These are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Hausa is spoken by the people of Northern Nigeria and Igbo by the Easterners. The Yoruba language which is the focus of this study is spoken by the Yorubas of Western Nigeria.

This study was aimed at investigating students' reading achievement as measured by proficiency and comprehension in both first and second languages. It sought to find out whether reading a second language is like reading in the mother tongue as theorized by Goodman (1973). Specifically, the study sought to test the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the reading achievement of students in English and Yoruba.
2. There is no significant difference in the reading achievement in English of students from high, average and low socio-economic backgrounds.

3. There is no significant difference in the reading achievement in Yoruba of students from high, average and low socio-economic backgrounds.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the study was drawn from three schools randomly selected from three local government areas of Lagos State. 120 senior secondary class 1 students (40 from each school) participated in the study. The students' Socio-Economic- Status was determined by assigning a weight which is based on the combined educational level and occupational status of the parents (Demarest, et al 1993). A student weight of 7.0 and above indicated that the parents of the student have a university or tertiary education and skilled employment. A student weight of 4.0 – 6.9 indicates that the parents of the student have a high school education and skilled employment. A student weight of 1.0-3.9 indicates a student belonging to parents with low educational level and low or unskilled employment. 42 of the students had a student weight between 7.0 – 8.0 which indicates a high SES background., 42 fell between 4.0– 6.9 which indicates Average SES while 36 fell between 1.0– 3.9 indicating low SES.

Measuring Instruments

The instruments used were:

- (1) Test of Reading Proficiency and comprehension in English and
- (2) Test of Reading Proficiency and comprehension in Yoruba

The reading comprehension passage in English entitled. 'The Responsibility of Parents was written by the researcher while the Yoruba reading comprehension passage entitled "firi nidi oke" was extracted from a Yoruba text Atoto Arere by Oladejo Okediji. There are five follow up comprehension questions in each text (see Appendices 1 & 2). The same time limits were allocated to both tests because they contained almost the same number of words(English 334; Yoruba 332) and administration took 45-60 minutes per test.

With a mean score of 7.67 and 6.36, high SES students had the highest reading and comprehension scores respectively in English. Low SES students recorded the lowest (4.53 and 2.42) respectively. The differences in the means were found to be statistically significant (ANOVA summary in Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Hypothesis 2(a) was therefore, rejected.

Table 2.1

**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE : V6 ENGLISH READING SCORE
BY V5 SES**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	201.575	2	100.788	31.161	.000
V5	201.575	2	100.788	31.161	.000
Explained	201.575	2	100.788	31.161	.000
Residual	378.425	117	3.234		
Total	580.000	119	4.874		

Table 2.2

MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS

Grand Mean = 6.000

1. HIGH SES	42	1.67	1.67
2. AVERAGE SES	42	.40	.40
3. LOW SES	36	1.47	1.47

.59 .59

Multiple R Squared .348

Multiple R .590

Table 2.3

**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE V7 ENGLISH COMPREHENSION
SCORE BY V5 SES**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	365.607	2	182.804	37.896	.000
V5	365.607	2	182.804	37.896	.000
Explained	365.607	2	182.804	37.896	.000
Residual	564.393	117	4.824		
Total	930.000	119	7.815		

Table 2.4

MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS

Grand Mean = 4.000

Variable + Category	N	Dev'n Eta	Dev'n Beta
1. HIGH SES	42	2.36	2.36
2. AVERAGE SES	42	1.00	1.00
3. LOW SES	36	1.58	1.58
			.63 .63
Multiple R Squared			.393
Multiple R			.627

High SES students also had the highest score for both reading (2.81) and comprehension (4.52) in Yoruba. Low SES students recorded the lowest (0.58 and 0.83 respectively). The differences in the means were found to be statistically significant (ANOVA summary in Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Table 3.1

**ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE V8 YORUBA READING SCORE
BY V5 SES**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	102.994	2	51.497	15.864	.000
V5	102.994	2	51.497	15.864	.000
Explained	102.994	2	51.497	15.864	.000
Residual	379.798	117	3.246		
Total	482.792	119	4.057		

Grand Mean = 1.958

1. HIGH SES	42	.85	.85
2. AVERAGE SES	42	.33	.33
3. LOW SES	36	1.38	1.38

Multiple R Squared .213

Table 3.2

YORUBA COMPREHENSION SCORE BY V5 SES

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Signif of F
Main Effects	264.873	2	132.436	21.607	.000
V5	264.873	2	132.436	21.607	.000
Explained	264.873	2	132.436	21.607	.000
Residual	717.119	117	6.129		
Total	981.992	119	8.252		

Grand Mean = 2.758

1. HIGH SES	42	1.77	1.77
2. AVERAGE SES	42	.12	.12
3. LOW SES	36	1.92	1.92
		.52	.52

Multiple R Squared .270

Multiple R .519

DISCUSSION

In this study, reading proficiency was operationally defined as the ability to read with correct pronunciation, and fluently while comprehension is defined as the ability to interpret and make meanings out of reading passages. The results showed that students in the sample were more proficient in reading English prose materials than reading prose materials in Yoruba. This result agrees with previous literature (Ayodele 1985) and Unoh (1991) that found reading achievement of students to be better in English than the mother tongue.

A probable explanation for this result is that the sample was drawn from around the Lagos metropolis where most students feel comfortable with communicating in English than the mother tongue because of the metropolitan nature of the city.

Another plausible reason for this finding is the problem of tonal marks in Yoruba. (Unoh 1991) A lot of attention had to be paid to them because they determine the pronunciation and meaning of the words in Yoruba. This is unlike the English words which do not have such tonal marks. Even though syllables are either stressed or unstressed in English, they do not reflect so much in reading prose passages as do the Yoruba tonal marks.

This also explains why the subjects performed better in comprehension of English prose materials. From the pattern of answering the questions, it was discovered that most of the subjects did not finish answering the Yoruba questions, a function of their inability to read the passage fast enough to be able to answer all the questions within the allotted period (the same number of minutes was allocated in the reading of the passages as well as providing answers to the comprehension questions).

How the socio-economic status of the students influence their reading achievement was also of interest in the study. It was found that high SES students recorded the highest mean reading score in English. This finding could be due in part to the opportunities opened to this class of students. For instance most of them have television sets at home. They watch different English programmes and listen to English news. Many of them by virtue of their literate parents have access to study books and novels written in English. They have the opportunity of going to picnics and other social gathering where they are exposed to situations which broaden their horizon and give them the opportunity of listening to and speaking English.

Low SES students achieved least in English reading probably because of their background. Many of them cannot afford to eat good food, talk less of having the opportunity to watch the television. They cannot afford to buy the prescribed textbooks not to talk of buying prose materials in English for extra reading.

As far as reading Yoruba is concerned, high SES students also performed better than the others. This could be because these students have higher IQ or that they are Yorubas or perhaps they speak Yoruba at home (thereby improving their familiarity with the language) being secondary school students whose oral language has transcended the 'Speak- English- Always' syndrome of elementary children from high SES.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data emerging from this study indicate that the students in the sample were more proficient in reading English prose material than reading prose materials written in Yoruba. A great deal of efforts still need to be put in towards bolstering the achievement levels of our students in reading prose materials in Yoruba.

Teachers of Yoruba should introduce the teaching of the tonal marks to students at an early age at the primary level. This will lesson the problem of slow reading caused by the identification of tonal marks. The reading of both Yoruba and English passages should also be introduced early enough as soon as pupils can recognize words and sentences.

Regardless of their social economic status, students should be encouraged to speak English at home and in the school. Government should encourage extensive reading by providing public libraries in the rural areas. This will provide avenues for children from low SES background to overcome their reading deficiencies.

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Appendix 1

READING PROFICIENCY AND COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH SECTION A

Please supply the information requested in 1 to 10 below,

1. Name of School:
2. Class:
3. Sex:
4. Ethnic Affiliation / Tribe:
5. Language of Conversation
At Home:
In the School:
6. My position in English in the third term examination is:
7. My father's occupation is:
8. My mother's occupation is:
9. I had my primary education in:
10. My best subject is:

Okebukola, F.O. (2004). Reading: Key to Lifelong Development. A keynote Address

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Unoh, S.O. (1991). Reading for Intellectual Development. A Psycholinguistic view. Literacy and Reading in Nigeria 5, 9-20.

Appendix 1

READING PROFICIENCY AND COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH SECTION A

Please supply the information requested in 1 to 10 below,

1. Name of School:
2. Class:
3. Sex:
4. Ethnic Affiliation / Tribe:
5. Language of Conversation
At Home:
In the School:
6. My position in English in the third term examination is:
7. My father's occupation is:
8. My mother's occupation is:
9. I had my primary education in:
10. My best subject is:

SECTION C

Now read the passage all over again silently and answer questions 1 to 5 below.

Write your answer in the space provided after each question.

You have 30 minutes with which to complete the assignment.

1. The word 'fust' in the sentence "An erring child was first scolded suggests that something else may happen after this first scolding.

What may happen?

2. What does "used to act in the place of parents" mean?
3. 'Nowadays' is in contrast to a group of words in the fourth paragraph. What are these words?
4. Why is the upbringing of a child taken to be a serious project?
5. From the passage who are those that are said to be concerned with the up-bringing of a child?

Appendix 2**READING PROFICIENCY AND COMPREHENSION IN YORUBA**

Please supply this information and read the passage below when asked to do so. You have 30 minutes to answer the questions below the passage.

1. Name:
2. Name of School:
3. Father's Occupation:
4. Mother's Occupation:
5. Language of Conversation
 - (a) In the School:
 - (b) At home

6. What is your best subject?
7. What was your position in Yoruba in the last promotion examination?
8. Where did you have your primary education?

.....

9. What is your ethnic affiliation? (E.g. Hausa, Tiv, Yoruba, Igbo etc)

10. Sex:

.....

Firi Nidi Oke

Oorun was in ojo naa ganan loun gbodo fi gbogbo agbara oun mu. Sugbon won nla ilu ja kiri, won n wo inu oorun naa. O pe ti won ti n woorun yii nigba ti Saminu fowo to Alaba ti won si jo kora ro.

'Duro Alaba. Obinrin naa niyi'

'Obinrin wo?

'Obinrin alate eekan. Abiamo eekan ti a ra tirebo lowo re.

'Se oun lo joko niwaju buka un?

Iwo o rii ni? Bi a ba de odo re bi mo ba ti n ra nnkan lowo re, iwo o dogbon da ate re nu ki o waa maa fo laralara lo sona ehin obinrin ohun. Ki o gba ese mu, pe nkan yi lu o lese.

'Lehin naa waaa nko?

'Ki iwo wa maa wo mi niran'.

Obinrin yii ti so omo to pon sehin kale. O ti gbe e le ese re, o gbe agolo kan to ti poko si, o fee fi eko ro omo. Ki awon Alaba too de odo re o ti dagbaa omo naa lori ese re, o nro o leko.

'Iya alate, mo fe ra siga

'Iru ewo?

'Oniboolu

'Dakun duro ki nro omo yii tan oko iya mi.

Alaba nse yu yu yu, obinrin naa si boju woo lehin. Kia ni Saminu gbe agolo owo alate o si gbe agolo ofifo owo re so sinu igba alate. Alaba ko mi, ti o fi se eleyi tan.

Saminu naa nsaaajo eke, o orii, o ti da igba onigba nu. Ara re o fi ojo kan bale ri. E dakun iya alate, e ma binu. Nigba ti kii se pe oju re fo.

Saminu tun be iya alate, oun at Alaba si kuro nibe. Won gba ona oke Atanilo lo. Won de iwaju ile – iwe kan nibe ni Alaba too fohun.

“Saminu eewo lo waa loo fori mi gbepe si lodo obinrin buruku yen? Oun niyi, won joko kale, won si ka owo ti o wa ninu agolo yii Naira meta ati kobo metalelogorin.

Awon Ibeere

1. Daruko awon omo meji ninu ayoka yi?

.....

2. Iya wo lo je awon omo naa ki won to de odo iya alate?

.....

3. Kinni ohun ti awon omo naa fe ji lodo iya alate?

.....

4. Taa lo koko soro Ikodo iya alate?

.....

5. So awon ohun ti iya alate yen se ki awon omo yen to de odo re?

.....