

A COMPARISON OF THE USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS
INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGES FOR CHILDREN'S ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN CROSS RIVER STATE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research work was carried out in Cross River State of Nigeria. The aim was to make comparism of the use of local language and English language as instructional languages for children's acquisition of literacy skills in English as a second language by children aged 3 – 5 yeas. One objective was set with one research question and one hypothesis. The survey research design was used for this study. The population of the study was 50,031 pupils from where a sample of 2500 pupils was drawn using the multi-stage sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was researcher made called Children Literacy Skills Acquisition Test (CLSAT). The reliability index of the instrument was obtained using test re-test method and a reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained. The method of data analysis was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result of the analysis showed that there was a significant difference in the acquisition of literacy skills by children in the urban and rural schools. The study concluded that both English language and local languages are good media of instruction, especially in the nursery and primary schools. But this is not similarly suitable in every part of Cross River State because of the intensity of multi-lingualism affecting the urban schools despite the correlational statistical difference between them. One of the recommendations made was that a balanced bilingual education system should be introduced where both the English and local languages are used in tandem for teaching literacy skills.

Keywords: Local Language, English Language, Instructional Languages, Children's Literacy Skills and Cross River State

INTRODUCTION

Teaching children to acquire literacy skills is difficult because it requires conscious efforts to plan and teach the children appropriate content at the appropriate time. This is why some children complete the primary level of education and learn very little. Tores (2008) explains that some children leave school without having learned how to read and write properly and even worse without having developed any need or desire to do so. This problem may be traced to:

children's' inability to make connection between classroom learning and everyday life; lack of teachers for the different levels of education; teachers' inability to teach the right content at the right time.

Lifelong learning is built from basic literacy, numeracy and transferable skills. A good foundation in literacy leads to success in all other aspects of life. Effective teaching brings the world close to the reader. Writing helps the writer to express his/her feelings. Reading and writing skills are key to academic success. Thus, it is important for children to acquire these skills appropriately and in good time.

Literacy skills (reading and writing) must be acquired before functional learning takes place. Reading and writing at the pre-school level involve pre-reading and writing skills acquisition. Children are to be introduced to these basic skills from the beginning so that their knowledge and or skills are not left hanging. Tinker and McCulough as cited in Agba (2006) are of the opinion that at all levels of education, reading should be both a subject of instruction and a tool employed on studying other subjects.

The Policy statement as found in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) Section 2, 14C, is that the Government shall ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment/community. Many scholars have identified the fact that the best language of instruction for a child is the language which the child has been born into, has grown with, has been using and has entered into school with. Obinaju (1993), Odey (2001), Asinya (2001), Ekpata (2001), Okonkwo (2005) and Fakeye and Sonyinka (2009).

Reading and writing in English language depends on the acquisition of basic pre-literacy skills. Since the acquisition of basic literacy skills lay the foundation for a successful educational and lifelong achievement, this research sets out to explore whether the national language policy on language of instruction in early childhood education has any relationship with children's acquisition of literacy skills in English as a second language. The target age is 3 – 5 years in Cross River State.

Statement of the Problem

In compliance with the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) section 2.14C, the language of instruction at the Early Childhood level of education is the local language. But the books to be used in imparting knowledge on the pupils are written in English. The job of the teacher who uses the local language as the language of instruction is principally interpretative. The child on his/her part is expected to read these books (written in English) and to write what he/she understands for the teacher to assess in English. A situation where a child is instructed in the local language whereas he is expected to develop literacy skills in English as a second language is self-problematic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to make a comparison of the use of local language and English language as languages of instruction for children's acquisition of literacy skills in English language in Cross River State.

Research Question

To what extent does the acquisition of literacy skills by children in the rural area who are taught using the local language differ from those in the urban area who are taught using the English Language.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the acquisition of literacy skills between children taught using English and those taught using the local language.

Significant of the Study

Reading and writing skills have been observed to be very essential for success in school and later in life. This research will help other researchers, teachers/caregivers, inspectors and education managers/monitors and government in curriculum reform and innovation which will help to improve the acquisition of literacy skills in children socially at this early stage.

Delimitation

This research was delimited to:

- i. The use of the local language as language of instruction in early childhood classes.
- ii. Acquisition of literacy skills by children aged 3-5 years.
- iii. All Nursery 1 and 2 classes in the 1140 schools to be studied in the 18 local Government Areas of Cross River State.

This research covers the concept of the national policy on the language of instruction in early childhood education and its relationship with the acquisition of literacy skills by children aged 3-5 years.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development. This unit examines the theories of language acquisition as presented by the different theories using the following sub-headings:

- a. The nature of the theories
- b. The interactionist theory
- c. The interactionist theory and the English as a second language classroom.
- d. The relevance of the interactionist theory to the study
- e. Implications of the theory to the caregiver

The nature of the Theories

Several authors present the theories of language acquisition in different ways, for example, Lightbown and Spada (2003) present three theories of language acquisition known as:

- a. behaviourism – say what I say
- b. innatism – its all in your mind
- c. the interactionist position – a little help from my friends

Davies (2004) presents three theories of language acquisition as follows:

The behaviourist theory – B. F. Skinner

The Chomskyan theory – N. Chomsky

The interactionist – Vygotsky and B. Brunner

What is common in the presentation by the two authors above, is that

- a language acquisition depends only on the environment
- b language acquisition is made possible due to innate capabilities and

-c language acquisition depends on the interaction between the individuals innate capabilities and the environment. Each of these theories of language acquisition according to Sawani(2011) accounts for the acquisition of certain aspects of language. Sawani, (2011) explains that while the behaviourist explains routine aspects of language; the chomskyan explains the learning of the more complex language structures and the interactionist account for understanding of how children relate form to meaning, interaction in conversation and how to use language appropriately. Considering the level of this research, the most suitable of all the theories of language acquisition presented above is the interactionist theory Vygotsky and Brunner. It is therefore necessary to explain this theory and relate it to this study.

The Interactionist Theory

The propounders of the interactionist theory are Lev Semenovich Vygotsky 1897-1934 and Jerome Seymour Brunner born October 1, 1915. Vygotsky's first research as a young scholar focused on artistic creation but from 1924 on his career changed dramatically as he started working in the areas of development psychology, educational psychology and psychopathology. According to Walter (2004), Brunner rejected the nativist account of language acquisition by Chomsky. He offered an alternative in the form of an interactionist or social interactionist theory of language development. In this approach, the social and interpersonal nature of language is emphasized. Following Lev Vygotsky and Russian theoretician of socio-cultural development of cognition in general and language in particular. He emphasized that children learn a language in order to communicate and at the same time they also the linguistic code. Brunner explains that meaningful language is acquired in the context of meaningful parent infant interaction. This theory believes that the modification of speech to suit the abilities of the learner is an essential component of languages acquisition process. (Davies and Elder 2004). This theory assumes that first and second languages acquisitions are similar and that there must be modification of speech for easy understanding by the learner. Schutzy (2004) states that the child first seems to use language for superficial social interaction but at some point this language goes underground to become the structure of the child's thinking. This leads to problem solving. Once the child realizes that everything has a name, each new object presents the child with a problem situation. The problem is solved when the object is named.

The Interactionist Theory and the English as a Second Language Classroom

When faced with learning English as a second language, the learner is essentially an infant. The learner cannot communicate with the teacher except through non-verbal communication. The teacher and the learner in this classroom are like the infant and its mother or other care-givers. It is therefore up to the teacher to act as the adult in the infant-adult relationship. He or she is responsible for leading all interactions at first and as the learner becomes more familiar with the English language and is able to communicate, the control of the interaction can be relinquished a bit and the learners can take more control of their language learning. The interactionist theory creates room for children to interact with one another and the adults around them. Children learn to speak by their opportunity to express themselves in the language they understand. Ball (2010) explains that L2 instruction in early childhood is limited to playful activities involving a few words, songs or games in L2. as a small part of the programmes. She further explains that L2 acquisition is better acquired

in informal programme settings and in daily routines than in formal instructional setting. Nicholas and Lightbown (2008) explain that young children learn a second language in the same way that older children and adults learn a second language. They advise early childhood educators to recognize the implicit understandings and skills that young children already have about language in order to build upon these strengths and maximize their potential for learning a second or additional language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

In this chapter, the procedures for this research are presented. These are summarized under the following subheadings: research area, research design, population of the study, sample and sampling procedures, instrument for data collection, validation of the research instrument, reliability of the instrument and method of data collection

Research Area

This research was carried out in Cross River State of Nigeria, Cross River State is found in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria. It is made up of eighteen (18) Local Government Area in all. Apart from the popular view of many, that Cross River State is a civil service state, the main occupation of the people of Cross River State is Agriculture. Majority of the people live in the rural areas in nucleated settlements. Some of the people are into subsistent agriculture while some are engaged in large scale agriculture which include crop production and animal rearing. There is also tree crop plantation. Along the creeks and swamps of the lower Cross River are some fishing settlements. Very few are into large scale business. Cross River is one of the food surplus areas of the country. Cross River Sate has three major languages, Efik, Bekwarra and Ejagham used for broadcasting and has about thirty two minor languages or dialects, (Agba 2006). The common language used as a means of communication between people of one ethnic group and another is the English Language, spoken mainly in the urban areas of the various Local Government Areas. The minor languages are spoken in the rural areas. Cross River State has 102 public primary schools in the urban areas of the state and 893 public primary schools in the rural areas. The researcher thought it wise to use the urban areas where the English language is used as a medium of instruction and the rural areas where the local language is used as a medium of instruction to examine the relationship between the languages used and the children's acquisition of literacy skills in English as a second language.

Research Design

The correlational research design was used for this study. This design was chosen because it allows the researchers to analyze the relationship among a large number of variables in single study. It can also provide information concerning the degree of the relationship between the variables being studied (Answers.com 2012)

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of all the nursery one and two pupils in the 1140 public primary schools in Cross River State. See Appendix 1. The total enrolment for Early Child Care development Education (ECCDE) as at May 2011 was 50,031 pupils. See appendix

II. Out of the 1140 schools, only 102 schools were located in the urban areas of the 18 Local Government Areas. While the remaining 1038 were located in the rural areas of the 18 Local Government Areas. See appendix III

Table 1.
Population of the Study

School type	No. of schools	No. of pupils
Urban	102	9954
Rural	1038	40074
Total	1140	50031

Source: Cross River State Universal Basic Education Board (May, 2011).

Sample and sampling procedures

The Multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this research. In this sampling procedure according to Korb (2011), sample is selected in multiple steps or stages and other sampling techniques may be used at the different stages. In the first stage geographical locations are selected e.g. Local Government Areas, Rural and Urban etc. In the second stage, schools are selected, and in the third stage the subjects (Unit of analysis) are selected. In this research, the stratified random sampling was used in the first stage. The Local Government Areas already on ground formed the strata. The state was further divided into the urban and rural areas. This was done to ensure appropriate representation of the sub-groups (urban and rural), in order to prevent a situation where only schools in the urban or rural areas are selected using the simple random sampling. The urban and rural schools were identified at this stage giving a total of 102 urban schools and 1038 rural schools.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument in gathering data for this research was researcher made. Children's Literacy Skills Acquisition Test (CLSAT). It was made up of 40 items but compressed into 25 questions in order to reduce the lengthy nature that could cause boredom in the children. The 25 item test was to test the eight (8) pre-reading/pre-writing skills as stated in the objectives of the research. The test was divided into two sections – A and B. Section A consisted of 15 questions and was designed to test the acquisition of pre-reading skills, namely picture reading, visual discrimination, word recognition and identification of letters of alphabet. The first 5 questions were to test the child's picture reading, the next 5 question were to test the child's visual discrimination and identification of letters of alphabet and the last 5 questions in section A were to test the child's word recognition. Section B consisted of 10 questions and was designed to test the pre-writing skills acquisition in the children. These skills were children's ability to make curves and strokes, their ability to follow direction that is left to right orientation. Children's ability to trace letter shapes and children's ability to form letter shapes. The first 5 questions were to pre-test the child's ability to trace letter shapes and formation of letter shapes. The last five questions were to test the child's ability to make curves and strokes and the mastery of left to right orientation. See appendix VI instrument.

Validation of the Research Instrument

Validation of the instrument was done by content-validation. The test items were given to subject experts one of them was from Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa and another from University of Cross River State, Calabar. Two were from University of Uyo, Uyo. They scrutinized the items carefully, made necessary corrections before approving the instrument for administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

In order to ensure the reliability of instrument, a test was conducted. Children's Literacy Skill Acquisition (CLSA) test was administered to a group of forty (40) children from a school that was not included in the study group. The test was administered twice at two weeks interval. The reliability index of the instrument was obtained by test-retest method. The Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient (r) was used to compute the result. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. Based on this high reliability, the instrument was considered suitable for use in conducting the research.

Method of Data Collection

With the use of research assistance oral tests and written tests were administered on children within two weeks.

Method of Data Analysis

The data for this research was analyzed, using the Pearson product moment correlation statistics. This method was used because it allowed the researcher to find out the strength of the relationship between the use of the local language as language of instruction and the acquisition of a given literacy skill as was stated. This was used to answer the research questions. The constant independent mean value of the 2,500 respondents was 40.19. This was recorded against the independent variables which is the local language. In order to show the strength and direction of the relationship, the following rating as presented by Ibanga 1992 was used as a guide.

From 0 - .25 means 0 – weak relationship

From 0.26 0.50 means moderately weak relationship

From 0.51 0.75 means moderately strong relationship

From 0.70 1 means strong to perfect relationship

Source: 1 Ibanga, 1992

To get the expected means, the questions for each of the variables were five which attracted 2.5 marks each 5 items multiplied by 2.5 gave 12.5 to get 50% of 12.5 it was divided into 2 to get 6.25 which was the expected means. The independent t-test was used to answer the research question which sought to find the difference in performance between children taught with the English language and those taught with the local language. The independent t-test analysis was used to compare the mean score of the two independent groups.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data analysis, result and discussion of findings are presented in this section under the following sub-headings:

Research question

Test of hypothesis

Discussion of the findings

Research Question

The research question states thus: To what extent does the acquisition of literacy skills by children in the rural area who are taught with the local language differ from those in the urban area who are taught with the English language? In order to answer the research question, a descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected.

Table2: Descriptive Analysis of the difference in the acquisition of literacy skills between pupils in urban and rural schools

Variable	N	X	SD	Mean difference
(Picture reading)				
Urban schools	458	9.26	2.12	0.55*
Rural schools	2042	8.71	1.88	
(Visual discrimination)				
Urban schools	458	8.53	2.11	0.82*
Rural schools	2042	7.71	1.86	
(Letter Identification)				
Urban schools	458	9.22	2.12	0.49*
Rural schools	2042	9.71	1.88	
(Word recognition)				
Urban schools	458	7.58	2.95	1.94*
Rural schools	2042	9.52	1.81	
(Orientation)				
Urban schools	458	8.26	1.55	1.31*
Rural schools	2042	9.57	1.59	
(Letter trace)				
Urban schools	458	4.21	1.47	0.64*
Rural schools	2042	7.57	1.59	
(Letter formation)				
Urban schools	458	7.37	1.49	1.19*
Rural schools	2042	8.56	1.59	
(curve making)				
Urban schools	458	6.42	1.49	0.15*
Rural schools	2042	6.57	1.59	

*** Remarkable difference**

Source: Field Survey

The table shows a descriptive analysis of the difference in the acquisition of literacy skills between pupils in urban and rural schools. From the analysis it was observed that urban and rural school pupils performed remarkably different with the mean difference of

00.55, 0.82, 0.49, 1.94, 1.34, 0.64, 1.19 and 0.15 for picture reading, visual discrimination, letter identification, word recognition, mastery of orientation, tracing of letter shapes, formation of letter shapes, making of curves and strokes respectively. The result therefore means that acquisition of literacy skills by children in the urban schools significantly differ from those in the rural school.

Test of Hypothesis

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the acquisition of literacy skills between children taught with English language and those taught with the local language:

In order to test hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows;

- 1) School location (urban and rural) as the independent variable
- 2) Acquisition of literacy skills as the dependent variable

Independent t-test was used in comparing the mean scores of the two independent groups as regards to the acquisition of literacy skills.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of the difference in the acquisition of literacy skills between pupils in urban and rural schools

Variable	N	X	SD	I
(Picture reading)				
Urban schools	458	9.26	2.12	5.55*
Rural schools	2042	8.71	1.88	
(Visual discrimination)				
Urban schools	458	8.53	2.11	786*
Rural schools	2042	7.71	1.86	
(Letter Identification)				
Urban schools	458	9.22	2.12	5.39*
Rural schools	2042	9.71	1.88	
(Word recognition)				
Urban schools	458	7.58	2.95	20.33*
Rural schools	2042	9.52	1.81	
(Orientation)				
Urban schools	458	8.26	1.55	15.88*
Rural schools	2042	9.57	1.59	

(Letter trace)					
Urban schools	458	4.21	1.47		
Rural schools	2042	7.57	1.59		7.94*
(Letter formation)					
Urban schools	458	7.37	1.49		
Rural schools	2042	8.56	1.59		14.69*
(Curve making)					
Urban schools	458	6.42	1.49		
Rural schools	2042	6.57	1.59		1.76*

* Significant at 0.05 level: Not significant at 0.05 level: df = 2498: N = 2500 critical r value = 1.96

The table shows the t-test value of 5.55, 7.86, 5.39, 20.33, 15.88, 7.94, 14.69 and 1.76 for picture reading, visual discrimination, letter identification, word recognition, mastery of orientation, tracing of letter shapes, formation of letter shapes, and curve making respectively. These values were tested for significance by comparing them with the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level with 2498 degree of freedom. The obtained t-values are greater than the critical t-value, except for curve making. Hence, the result is significant. The result therefore means that there is significant difference in literacy skills (except for curve making) between children in urban and rural schools. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion of the Findings

The Acquisition of Literacy Skills by Children Taught with English and Those Taught with Local Language in Urban and Rural Areas

The result of the data analysis shown means that the acquisition of literacy skills has a significant difference between children taught with English and those taught with local language in urban and rural areas, except for curve making. The significance of the result is not in agreement with any known previous research work since no previous empirical research was found on the relationship between children taught with English and those taught with the local language in the rural and urban areas studied. However the field survey shows that children in the urban areas participated more actively in their interaction with the researcher than the children in the rural areas. The caregivers in the urban schools were more active and effective. The researcher asked why it was so and they explained that the inspectors of schools are always visiting them and that it is only if they are opportune to work in the rural schools that they will rest because, inspectors hardly visit the rural schools, especially during the raining season.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that both English language and local languages are good media of instruction, especially in the nursery and

primary schools. But this is not similarly suitable in every part of Cross River State because of the intensity of multi-lingualism affecting the urban schools despite the correlational statistical difference between them. The use of vernacular in the rural schools is as instructionally productive as the use of English language in the urban schools.

Recommendations

1. Introduce a balanced bilingual education system where both the English and local languages are used in tandem for teaching literacy skills.
2. Create a structured program that gradually introduces English literacy instruction alongside local languages. By the later stages of primary education, English should take a more prominent role.

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