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EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE OF JSS1 STUDENTS IN AKINYELE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In a multilingual state like Nigeria, policies guiding curriculum planning provides for the learning of dominant languages to enable individuals to function in more than one language. However, it has been argued that the use of additional language other than the first language in education poses cognitive problems for learners. In this study, investigation was made into the effects of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of junior secondary school students. Using the pre-test post-test control group experimental design, two secondary schools were randomly selected in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. Twenty students were randomly selected from each school. Treatment was assigned to the bilingual group but the English-only group was taught in English language only. Result showed that there was no negative effect of bilingualism on students' performance in reading comprehension when the two groups were compared. Bilingual education should therefore, be encouraged in multilingual states.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Multilingual, Comprehension, English Language, Reading

Introduction

Bilingualism is a global issue which in no small measure has been widely studied and discussed. It has become more pertinent with globalization which is gradually shrinking the world thereby necessitating closer social interactions among different people. Consequently, there is a considerable need for education that could positively impact on the linguistically and culturally diverse population. In areas where the indigenous language is different from the language of wider communication, bilingual education is always adopted in schools. Bilingualism has been variously defined by different scholars from one situation to another situation. In the popular view, bilingualism is being able to speak two languages effectively. Bloomfield (1935) stated that bilingualism occurs when a speaker has a native-like control of two languages. A working definition of bilingualism adopted by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (Shell, 1992), as quoted in Hall (1995), presents bilingualism as living in two languages, having access to them by pupils who need to use two or more languages at home or at school, with or without competency or fluency in both.

In every multilingual society, Nigeria inclusive, educational policies guiding curriculum planning provide for the teaching and learning of a language of wider communication that could equip learners to function in more than one language. Literally, bilingualism seems at first sight to be non-problematic but the claims and counter-claims surrounding various bilingual studies have rendered it quite complex. Benson (2004) had noted that bilingual practices and models vary from place to place and so do their results. Olagbaju (2009) stated that some scholars consider bilingualism as a problem or barrier to effectiveness in language teaching and learning. They see it as counter-productive to learner's proficiency in more than one language. Eze (2004) said some linguists believed

that bilingualism is one of the causes of poor achievement in schools.

On the contrary, Lucido and Mceachern (2000) examined the English reading scores of a group of primary age children in South Texas who were being educated in a dual language programme. Their research result suggested that balanced language development does not have a negative influence on reading comprehension but rather, the more balanced bilinguals received highest scores. However, Olagbaju (2009) argued that how the teacher and the learner handle the challenges of bilingualism can either enhance or impede teaching and learning. Reading comprehension is a complex process of deciphering the author's intention through the strategic use of thinking, questioning, anticipating, evaluating and interpretative skills. It is a one-on-one interaction between the reader and the material being read with the aim of following the writer's thought process to arrive at his/her message.

While reading has been identified as a literacy skill very vital in an English Language curriculum, Bright and McGregor (1970) stated that all over Africa, secondary schools are producing students who have read very little. In the present generation, any individual who is not able to apply the skills of reading and writing especially in receiving and processing information is regarded as illiterate irrespective of the amount of knowledge repository in him/her (Kolawole, 2005). The linguistic ability of learners is therefore important in considering matters of reading comprehension teaching and learning. The National Policy on Education (NPE) presents a multilingual system in which English language dominates the first language (L1) to the extent that only the first three years of every Nigerian child's academics are taught in L1. While the L1 is continued as a subject of study, English language

takes over as the medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary education to the tertiary level. Even though, the policy makers believe that the products of the system beyond the primary school would read and understand better in English than in L1 because of exposure to L1, it is necessary to investigate the effects of the use of both L1 and English mediums on the reading comprehension performance of bilingual secondary school students.

This study therefore investigated the effects of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of junior secondary school (JSS1) students. The moderating effects of school type and gender were also determined.

Statement of the Problem

Several efforts have been made to establish the place of bilingualism in English language performance of learners. Several theories have been propounded and studies carried out on the effects of bilingualism on language learners. Research seems to suggest that students taught through bilingual programme have cognitive advantage over others. However, the transitional level, that is, the stage where students transit from primary to secondary level, has not been very widely examined. In view of this, this study focused on the effects of bilingualism on English reading comprehension performance of junior secondary school students.

Hypotheses

- H01** There is no significant effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of male and female JSS 1 students.
- H02** There is no significant effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of JSS1 students in the public and the private school.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in the following ways.

It will provide insight into the effectiveness of adopting bilingualism in the English language reading comprehension classroom. It is believed that findings from this study will help English Language teachers apply better options for teaching reading comprehension at the primary school level.

Researchers will find this study a significant contribution to existing research and practices in English reading comprehension teaching and learning. The study would have provided empirical information for policy makers and curriculum planners who seek for effective ways of teaching reading comprehension in schools. The study could be a step to further research in bilingual teaching in other areas of English Language.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Thresholds Theory, associated with Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) and Cummins (1976) wherein they have provided evidence of possible negative or positive cognitive consequences of bilingualism in second language learning. They posited three thresholds and each threshold represents a level of linguistic competence that children must reach, firstly, to avoid the negative consequences of bilingualism and secondly to experience the possible positive consequence of bilingualism. According to them, the child may experience either positive, negative, or neither negative nor positive cognitive effects depending on whether that child has limited proficiency or partial bilingualism. At the lowest level are those whose current linguistic skills in both languages are relatively insufficiently developed mostly when compared to others in their age group. Low level of competence in home language may cause negative or detrimental effects leading to limited academic ability.

At the middle level, when a child can function effectively in one language, there are likely to be no negative or positive cognitive effects. On the other hand, at the highest level when a child is relatively balanced and proficient in both languages, there is the potential of cognitive benefits and such a child will exhibit age-appropriate ability in both languages.

The educational implications of the threshold theory are far reaching. If any reading problem is presented, the source of the problem should be identified. If the source is traced to poor linguistic knowledge then instruction would focus on developing linguistic competence in L₁ and through it to L₂. If the source is assumed to be poor reading strategies in L₁, and through it to L₂, then instruction would focus on appropriate reading strategies. This is in line with Clarke's (1979) position that a certain threshold of linguistic proficiency may have to be established before L₁ reading comprehension skills are transferred to L₂.

The Place of Bilingualism in English Language Learning

A lot of research carried out in second language learning (Cummins, 1984; Dulay et al, 1982) suggest that facility in a first language is a help rather than a hindrance to learning in a second language. However, children whose own L1 is not well established at school age are statistically likely to be at a disadvantage in acquiring a second language (L2). This according to Cummins (1984) is because the underlying conceptual and linguistic proficiency will not be sufficiently developed to aid transfer. Therefore, it was stressed that pupils' L1 must be valued and also recognized, developed and used in school. When the first language is used in school, the learner is taught the fundamental concepts of a topic in a fa-

miliar language. Once the concepts are learnt, the learner can easily apply them to a second language learning situation. In agreement with this, Eze (2004) stressed that when learners are given the opportunity to use both L1 and L2 in their academic studies, they do not experience difficulty in developing L2 proficiency. Some research findings equally suggest that bilingualism promote overall cognitive development advantage (Borich and Tombari, 1997). Peal and Lambert (1962) in reporting on English/French bilingual students stated that intellectually, the bilingual students have "a mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation, and a more diversified set of mental abilities..." Studies indicate that the further a child moves towards balanced bilingualism (equal competence in all areas of the two languages) the greater the likelihood of cognitive advantages – a desired outcome of any educational programme (Cummins and Mulcahy, 1978; Kessler and Quin, 1982; Clarkson, 1992).

In contrast however, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks. These studies also reported that those bilinguals who loved and respected both of their languages showed positive effects in the areas of creativity and mental flexibility as compared to monolinguals and those who believe that one of the languages is better than the other.

Green (1998) gave a report of a study at Thomas Rivera Policy Institute which examined eleven studies involving 2719 students, 1562 of whom were enrolled in bilingual education programs in 13 states. According to the study, students with limited English proficiency who went through the bilingual programs performed better in standardized tests than their counterparts taught only in English. A similar report of a meta-analysis of six bilingual programme results in USA (Cummins, 1983a) showed each result illustrating that the language minority pupils' progress in some form of bilingual schooling is as good as and sometimes better than that of pupils in monolingual schools. This is in contrast to the finding of Mouw and Xie (1999) which found no evidence that bilingualism per se has a positive effect on achievement.

In an examination of the influence of bilingualism on English reading scores of a group of primary age children in South Texas who were being educated in a

dual language programme, result suggested that balanced language development did not have a negative influence on reading comprehension. The more balanced bilinguals received highest scores based on Iowa Test on Basic Skills (ITBS) (Lucido Mceachern, 2000).

In view of these claims, this paper investigated the effects of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension of JSS1 students to determine the effect of bilingual teaching on their performance.

Design

The study adopted the pre-test/post-test control group experimental design. Subjects were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups and given a pre-test in English language reading comprehension. The purpose of the experimental group is purely for comparison. The two groups are measured on the same English language test and the average difference between the two groups is compared.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

For the purpose of the study, one private school, Adejare International School, Moniya, and one public school, Ojoo Junior High School, Alaka, Ojoo, were randomly selected in Akinyele Local Government Area in Oyo state, Nigeria. Each school was assigned both the bilingual and English group. Ten students were randomly assigned to each group. Twenty students were altogether studied in each selected school.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was reading comprehension tests based on government approved text material for JSS1 students. Four different passages and tests, spread across two weeks were taught and tests were administered on participating students in both bilingual and English language groups. Passages were adopted from government approved English books and school-recommended English books respectively. The instrument was validated and tested for reliability using test-re-test method. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained.

Results

H01: There is no significant main effect of bilingualism on English Language reading comprehension performance of boys and girls.

Table 1 (a): Summary of ANCOVA to show the effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of male and female students.

Source	Sum of Squares	D	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Covariates	4864.110	1	4864.110	19.137	.000	
Pre-test	4864.110	1	4864.110	19.137	.000	
Main effects	99.494	1	99.494	.391	.535	
Sex	99.494	1	99.494	.391	.535	n.s.
Explained	4963.604	2	2481.802	9.764	.000	
Residual	9404.171	37	254.167			
Total	14367.77	39	368.404			

Table 1 (a) shows that there was no significant effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of boys and girls in the two schools ($F_{(2,37)} = .391$; $P > .05$).

Table 1 (b) Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) showing the direction of the results above

Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted variation	Eta	Adjusted for independent+ covariates deviation	Beta
Grand Mean = 80.58					
Sex					
1. Male	20	.58		1.58	
2. Female	20	-.58		-1.58	
			.03		.08
Multiple R-squared					.345
Multiple R					.598

In Table 1 (b), the mean score of the male students is $(80.58 + 1.58) X = 82.15$ while that of the female students is $(80.58 - 1.58) X = 79.00$. **HO1** is therefore, not rejected.

HO2: There is no significant effect of bilingualism on English Language reading comprehension performance of students in public and private schools.

Table, II (a): Summary of ANCOVA to show the significant effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of students in the public and private schools.

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Covariates	4864.110	1	4864.110	35.606	.000	
Pre-test	4864.110	1	4864.110	35.606	.000	
Main effects	4449.155	1	4449.155	32.569	.000	
Schools	4449.155	1	4449.155	32.569	.000	Sig.
Explained	9313.265	2	4656.633	34.087	.0000	
Residual	5054.510	37	136.608			
Total	14367.77	39	368.404			

* Significant at $P > 0.05$

Table II (b) shows that there is significant effect of bilingualism on English language reading comprehension performance of students in the public and private school ($F_{(2,37)} = 32.569$, $P < .05$).

Table II (b): Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) showing the direction of the results above

Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted variation	Eta	Adjusted for independent + covariates deviation	Beta
Grand Mean = 80.58					
Sex	20	-9.17		-10.62	
1. Private					
2. Public	20	9.17	.48	10.62	.56
Multiple R-squared					.648
Multiple R					.805

In table II (b), the mean score of the private school is $(80.50 + 10.62) \times X = 69.96$ while that of the public school is $(80.58 + 10.62) \times X = 91.2$. **HO2** is therefore, rejected.

Discussion

This investigation on the effects of bilingualism on English reading comprehension performance of JSS1 students tested two hypotheses. The first hypothesis tested showed that there is no significant effect of bilingualism on English reading comprehension performance of male and female students studied. This implies that students would do as well irrespective of the language of instruction so long as the language is mutually intelligible. The use of two languages in teaching one group of students did not make them perform better. This finding is in keeping with Mouw and Xie (1999) who reported no evidence that bilingualism per se has a positive effect on achievement. It also agrees with Cummins (1983a) who reported that the language minority pupils' progress in some form of bilingual schooling is as good as that of pupils in monolingual schools. These results however, differ from the findings of Green (1998) which showed that students with limited proficiency who went through bilingual programs performed better in standardized tests than their counterparts taught only in English. Similarly, Lucido and Mceachern's (2000) report is in agreement with Green (1998) which reported that the more balanced bilinguals were among those with the highest scores based on Iowa Test on Basic Skills (ITBS). The result of this finding could be explained in the sense that the students are already being taught in English language from primary four. So, an additional language might not make much difference. Secondly, the study period might not be enough to make much impact in line with Baker's (1996) proposition of four or five year process duration.

The second hypothesis tested for significant effect of bilingualism on reading comprehension performance of students in the public and private schools. When results were compared, it showed that there was significant difference. It is significant here at this point to note that students in the public school performed better than students in the private school in English language reading comprehension when taught in two languages simultaneously. Not much study has been

carried out in this area of comparison of performance of public and private school students in bilingual education and so, result could not be compared with previous findings.

Conclusion

This investigation has shown that bilingualism does not affect English language reading comprehension performance negatively. When students are taught in the language that would help them learn using the appropriate instructional strategy, they do well whether they are bilingual or monolingual. Therefore, bilingualism should not be seen as a setback for learners but should rather be seen as complementary to education in general.

Recommendations

Reading is a very important skill in academic pursuit. It is very central to academic success and, therefore, should be appropriately handled. It is hereby recommended that:

1. Bilingual teaching should be adopted in reading comprehension lessons since it does not have any negative effects on students' performance but rather tends to improve it.
2. Bilingualism should be encouraged in the classroom as a way of preservation of the indigenous languages.

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