

Assessment of Reading Efficiency of the Igbo Second Language (L₂) Learners In Selected Colleges of Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed the reading efficiency of the Igbo second language (L₂) learners from Colleges of Education located in the Northern, Western and Southern parts of Nigeria. It compared the mean reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ learners based on the location of their Colleges. It also compared the mean reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ male and female students from the Colleges of Education. A sample of 68 participants was drawn by purposive sampling technique (24 from the North, 22 from the West and 22 from the South). The instrument used for data collection was the reading test developed by the author. The instruments were face validated. Reliability was determined using Pearson product moment analysis which yielded coefficient value of 0.74. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, ANOVA and t-test. The results of data analyses showed a significant mean difference in the reading achievements among the Igbo L₂ students from the colleges at the three locations. Post Hoc test (multiple comparison) indicated that students from the North performed better in the reading test than those from the South and West respectively while students from the West and South had no significant mean difference in their reading achievements. Results also showed no significant mean difference between the Igbo L₂ male and female students' achievements in the reading test. Based on the finding of the study, recommendations that would improve L₂ teaching and learning as well as the development of reading competence among the Igbo L₂ learners were made.

Key words: Assessment, reading, efficiency and second language

Introduction

The multilingual and multicultural status of the Nigerian nation presents the need to promote cultural integration and national unity. Government of Nigeria saw language as unifying factor and thus provided for second language education in the National Policy on Education (NPE). Hence, it was stated that, "at the junior secondary school, a child learns one Nigerian language other than his/her mother tongue or first language (L₁); subject to availability of teacher (NPE 2004;17). The government chose the three languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba to be regional languages. These languages according to the provision of the NPE are to be taught and learned at junior secondary schools all over the nation as second languages; subject to availability of teachers.

Government took measures in solving the teacher problem by establishing the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and charged her among other functions with the production of Nigerian Languages Teachers at both first and second language (L₁ and L₂) levels. As a complement to the efforts of NINLAN and Departments of Nigeria Languages in Nigerian Universities, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), mounted second language (L₂) programme in the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) in States and Federal Colleges of Education in the country.

The aim is to ensure availability of adequate number and quality of second language teachers for possible implementation of the L₂ provisions of the NPE. Today, Igbo language, like her other sister regional languages is taught and learned at second language level in about 16 Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

The aim and objectives of Igbo L₂ programme as enshrined in the NCCE Minimum Standard, (2005) clearly states that at the end of the programme, the Igbo L₂ students should be able to:

- a. Understand clearly simple Igbo whether spoken or written.
- b. Reasonably express their own thought and experiences in simple spoken or written Igbo.
- c. Reasonably teach Igbo at the primary and junior secondary school levels in the absence of a trained Igbo L₁ teacher.
- d. Acquire sufficient proficiency in the language to pass NCE and to pursue further studies in the language.

In giving reality to these objectives, the NCCE came up with a curriculum that is largely inclusive in content. The analysis of the curriculum shows that within the three year-duration programme, the Igbo L₂ students in addition to courses geared towards developing communicative competence, are exposed to courses in core language, literature and culture. It is expected that Igbo L₂ students who have been exposed to this curriculum at least for one year would not only show some level of communicative competence but also linguistic and of course reading competence.

After one year into the programme, the students are exposed to Acculturation Programme (a language immersion programme). The Acculturation Programme is a programme that brings the L₂ learners in direct contact with the native speakers of the target language by having them live among the native speakers in the natural speech communities for the stipulated duration. The period of acculturation programme is the enabling environment and occasion to assess in practical terms, how much of the target language and culture the learners are able to learn or understand. This is crucial because, without the competences of speaking and reading among other skills, it will be impossible for the L₂ learners to achieve the objectives of the programme let alone the national goal.

Statement of the Problem

To achieve the objectives of the L₂ programme as stipulated by the NCCE Minimum Standard, a higher demand is made on the beneficiaries of the programme. They require skills in reading. Reading is a higher language skill preceded by listening and speaking. This is evident in the last two objectives which require the students to;

- Reasonably teach Igbo at the primary and junior secondary school levels in the absence of a trained Igbo L₁ teacher;
- Acquire sufficient proficiency in the language to pass NCE and to pursue further studies in the language?.

Nobody is expected to achieve these or attain these heights in second language situation without sufficient proficiency in reading in the target language. The fundamental question is, do the Igbo L₂ learners show sufficient proficiency in reading in the target language?

The National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) Aba is an accredited Acculturation Centre for the Igbo L₂ learners in Nigerian colleges of education. For over 15 years, the Igbo L₂ learners have been participating in NINLAN's Acculturation Programme. As the students arrived NINLAN from different locations in the country (Northern, Western and Southern), it is observed that there is disparity in their entry behavior. Apart from the disparity observed in their communicative competence where some groups are able to speak, communicate and interact with native speakers and teachers on arrival as expected,

where some others would not, there has also been observable disparity in the students' performances in reading. While some groups would arrive with appreciable reading competence in the target language, some others prove not to have been exposed to reading in Igbo. Although, there are other variables that can influence the learners' achievement such as sex, attitude, here, the location of the colleges was strongly suspected to be responsible for the differences in the students' reading competence in L₂ situation.

This study therefore assessed the reading efficiency of the Igbo second language (L₂) learners in selected Colleges of Education in Nigeria. It compared the reading efficiency of the learners from Colleges of Education located in the Northern, Western and Southern parts of the country.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the reading efficiency of the Igbo L₂ learners from Colleges of Education located in the northern, western and southern parts of Nigeria. The objectives are to compare;

1. The mean reading achievement scores of Igbo L₂ learners from Colleges of Education located in the northern, western and southern parts of Nigeria.
2. The mean reading achievement score between the Igbo L₂ male and female students' from the Colleges of Education.

Research Questions

1. What is the mean difference in the reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the northern, western and southern parts of Nigeria?
2. What is the mean difference in the reading achievement scores between the Igbo L₂ male and female students from Colleges of Education?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant mean difference in the reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the North, West and Southern Nigeria.
2. There is no significant mean difference between the reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ male and female students from the Colleges of Education.

Review of related literature

Location and Second Language (L₂) Learning

The proponents of environmentalist theory (Piaget, Brunner) argue for much support naturally occurring on the environment for language learning. They hypothesize that without environmental support, learning will not take place. Ellis (2007), in discussing educational setting and second language learning identified two types of setting- the 'natural' and 'educational' setting. Setting is natural if the learner has contact with other speakers of the target language in a variety of situations such as, in the workplace, at home, through the media, at conferences, on business meetings etc. Educational setting is viewed by Ellis as 'traditionally found in institutions such as schools, universities and also in computer mediated environments.

There will be some learners who experience the L₂ entirely in natural setting and others whose only contact with it is in educational setting. However, many L₂ learners will experience the language in both natural and educational settings. The distinction between natural and educational setting may be a factor

of location. Accordingly, setting has been viewed as determining how successful learners are in learning a second language, (Ellis 2007). Ellis further illustrates this setting with what he describes as 'the language classroom setting' where the target language is taught as a subject only and is not commonly used as a medium of communication outside the classroom. For examples; 'foreign' language classrooms like Japanese classes in the united states or English classes in china and 'second' language classrooms where the learners have no or minimal contact with the target language outside the classroom. (For example 'ESL' classes in a Francophone area of Canada). In these situations the social significance of the target language has been deemed minimal because its speakers are remote from the learners. This gives indication that location may be a strong factor in L₂ learning. Thus, it can be speculated that those who learn L₂ at locations or settings very remote from the speech community of the target language may not likely have regular contact with the native speakers of the target language and as such, environmental support may be lacking. The converse could be the case with learners at locations that are not remote from the geographical location of the target language.

Furthermore, the views of the Interactionists suggest that interaction is a strong factor in L₂ acquisition and learning. Research by Lightbrown and Spada (1999), confirms that L₂ learners gain proficiency when they interact with more advanced speakers of the language (teachers and peers). It is then not out of place to opine that location or setting predicates interaction with not only native speakers but also with reading materials in the target language. Learners at locations not remote from the target language (geographical environment) may likely encounter reading in the target language as a daily and unconscious experience outside of the L₂ classroom experience with teachers and peers. This occurs as they often come across variety of written expressions in the target L₂ such as inscriptions on vehicles, houses, shops, market places, signposts, stickers etc. These inscriptions take different forms and are quite attractive. They may form useful input to the L₂ learners and also serve the purposes of exposing the learners to reading.

Also, given the role of location and setting in L₂ learning, one can opine that location predicates availability of reading materials. Textbooks may be available in their variety to learners at locations that are not remote to the target language environment so much so that they have opportunity to choose materials and even engage in both leisure/recreational and independent reading. The converse may be the case for learners at locations remote to the target language community. Environmental factor is one of the factors that can mar or facilitate second language acquisition/learning. If an enabling environment is created especially by the L₂ teacher (that is a friendly, stress-free) environment with variety of relevant materials in place, the learners will take advantage of it and progress in their language learning accordingly.

Sex and Second Language (L₂) Learning

Sex differences in language acquisition and learning has received considerable attention in the recent past. Ekstrand (2008), in his article titled, 'sex differences in L₂ learning' reveals what a long standing research on sex differences in linguistic performance had been. Neuro-physiological studies have proved the existence of sex differences concerning the functioning of the brain, thereby discriminating between the linguistic performance of females and males. Also ,behavioral and clinical data reveal that women appear to be less lateralized for language function, yet as a group, they are superior to men in language skill.

Jimenez's (2003) research on vocabulary learning strategies suggests that, visual and tactile learning is preferred by males, whereas females resort to auditory learning. Powell and Blatter, (1985) also observes that girls are superior to boys in all aspects of linguistic process, therefore showing a greater aptitude for language learning. However, Paula's(2006) research on sex differences in language development shows that, 'in preschool and early school years, there are few differences or no differences at all between boys and girls until around the age of ten or eleven years when girls establish a definite pattern of superior verbal performance, which continues through the high school and college years' but in earlier review by Anatasi,(1958) and other studies cited in Ekstrand (2008), girls have been reported to talk earlier, have larger vocabulary, use sentences earlier, use longer and more mature sentences than boys and learn to read

faster than boys. Also, young girls have been found to articulate better than boys and have smaller frequency of speech and reading disorders. In schools, Anatasi found that girls use more words in composition and excel in speed of reading and in tests such as opposites, analogies, sentence and story completion and dissected sentences.

From the data discussed, Paula concluded that although both males and females have the same level of linguistic potential as human beings (aptitude in a general sense), females' linguistic skills somehow seemed more prone to be stimulated in order to reach higher linguistic competence. Van Der Meulen, (1987 cited in Paula 2006) quotes several studies which report higher scores for girls of 7-10 years of age on their perception of personal abilities, particularly their reading and spelling skills while boys on the other hand give higher evaluations of their physical abilities.

Methods

Research Design: The design was descriptive survey. This was adopted to enable a comparison of the mean reading achievement of the Igbo L₂ learners from colleges of education located in the North, West and Southern Nigeria as well as the mean reading achievements between the male and female students from the colleges.

Participants: As has been mentioned earlier in this paper, the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) Aba is the accredited center for Igbo Acculturation Programme (immersion programme). At the end of the first year of study, all students that study Igbo as a second language in the sixteen (16) Colleges of Education (located in the northern, western and southern parts of Nigeria) are hosted annually in NINLAN, Aba on Acculturation Programme. Cumulatively, 100 Igbo L₂ students from the Colleges participated in the Acculturation Programme in the year 2014 and they constituted the population of the study. A sample of 68 students was drawn from the population using purposive sampling technique (24 from the North, 22 from the West and 22 from the South). The population was not homogenous. There were students among them who are native speakers of Igbo language by reason of origin but they were born and raised in the North, West or Southern Nigeria. These categories of the population do not have native speakers' competence as to be enrolled in the Igbo first language (L₁) programme of the Colleges. They were enrolled in the Igbo second language programme along with the non native speakers because they were on the L₂ programme, Acculturation Programme was compulsory for them. In order not to be biased and to avoid contamination, such category of students was excluded in the study.

Instrumentation: The instrument used for data collection was reading test. The reading test had three different formats (i-iii); test (i) was a reading comprehension passage that carried 40 marks. The reading comprehension passage was an interesting passage in Igbo titled "*MaaziEmeka Na EzinauloYa*" (Mr. Emeka and His Family). It had eight questions attracting 5 marks each. This test was designed to assess the ability of the respondents to read a text in Igbo with understanding. Ability of the participants to obtain information from the text and give feedback by means of answering the follow up questions correctly reflect their achievement in reading.

Test (ii) was a cloze test which also carried 40 marks. The cloze test was also an interesting passage in Igbo titled "*NwambanaUgoloma*" (the Cat and the Crow- a bird species) which was converted to cloze test where the first two sentences were left intact and subsequently every seventh word was deleted. The participants were expected to fill the gaps with the deleted words using context, syntactic and semantic clues to determine the deleted words. A total of 20 deletions were made. This test also assesses the ability of the participants to identify missing information in the text. Ability of the second language learner to gain closure by using all the clues available in the text to predict the word deleted in the text is a remarkable reading achievement. Test (iii) was an editing test which was allotted 20 marks. The editing test is a counterpart to the cloze test. A passage titled "*Adaku, Enyi m Oma*" (Adaku, My Good Friend) was converted to editing test by sprinkling of unwanted words to constitute noise in the passage. The

participants were expected to cross-out (//) any word that constituted noise in the passage. A total of ten (10) words were sprinkled systematically. The editing test assessed the ability of participants to edit textual noise. The ability of the Igbo second language reader to identify irrelevant items in the text and cross them out is a good reading achievement. Face validity was used to ascertain the validity of the instrument. The instrument was first perused carefully by five Igbo lecturers who also take part in the teaching of the Igbo L₂ learners on the Acculturation Programme annually. After this, the instrument was presented to two experts in measurement and evaluation in the School of Education and Ancillary Studies in NINLAN who perused it extensively and made generous input from which the instrument was modified. However, the content validity of the instrument was not obtained.

Given the fact that there was no comparable group around, the instrument was administered to thirty (30) Igbo L₁ students of NINLAN, Aba. This is in line with the recommendations of Hughes (2004), on second language testing and validation. Reliability was obtained through test-retest method. The tests were administered twice in two weeks interval and the two sets of scores generated were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Analysis. The correlation coefficient value (r) of 0.74 was obtained. This high value certified the instrument reliable.

Procedure for Data Collection: Sixty-eight copies of the instrument were administered and collected on-the-spot. The exercise was strictly supervised by the researcher with the assistance of a colleague to control for misconduct.

Methods of Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Hypothesis 1 was tested using One-Way ANOVA while hypothesis 2 was tested using t-test analysis.

Results

This section presents the analysis of data following the chronological order of the research questions and the hypotheses.

Research Question 1:

What is the mean difference in the reading achievement score of the Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the northern, western and southern parts of Nigeria?

This question was answered with the reading test mean scores of the students based on the three locations as shown in table 1:

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Achievement in the Reading Test Classified by Location.*

Location	ÌgbòL ₂	Reading Performance	
	N	\bar{X}	SD
North	24	21.46	12.50
West	22	13.82	6.37
South	22	12.18	9.40

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the achievements of Igbo L₂ students from colleges located in the North, West and South in the reading test. It was observed that whereas the mean score difference between the West and South locations were negligible, the mean score of the North location is significantly higher than that of the West and South.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant mean difference in the reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the North, West and South.

This hypothesis was tested using the ANOVA as shown in table 2:

Table 2: ANOVA summary of the mean difference in the reading achievements of Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the North, West and South.

Source of variation	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	Result
Between Groups	1140.48	2	570.24	5.87	3.94	Significant
Within Groups	6306.50	65	97.02			
Total	7446.98	67				

Table 2, above, is the ANOVA summary of the difference in the reading achievement among the Igbo L₂ students from Colleges of Education located in the North, West and South. The calculated F ratio is 5.87 at (2, 65) degrees of freedom which is higher than the critical F value of 3.94. The result is significant. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected while the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant mean difference in the reading achievement among the Igbo L₂ students from colleges of education located in the North, West and South is accepted. In order to determine the actual performances of the different groups, a Post Hoc analysis is presented below on Table 3:

Table 3: Scheffe Multiple Comparison of Reading Achievement

(1) Location	(J) Location	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Upper bound	Lower bound
North	West	7.64	2.907	.038	.36	14.92
	South	9.28	2.907	.009	1.99	16.56
West	North	-7.64	2.907	.038	-14.92	-.36
	South	1.64	2.970	.859	-5.80	9.08
South	North	-9.28	2.907	.009	-16.56	-1.99
	West	-1.64	2.970	.859	-9.08	5.80

***The mean difference is significant at the .05 level**

The Post Hoc analysis indicated significant mean difference between North and West (7.64) and between North and South (9.28). Hence, students from North had better reading achievement than the West, than

the South also. However, there was no significant mean difference between the reading achievements of students from West and South(1.64).

Research Question 2.

What is the mean difference in the reading achievement score between the Igbo L₂ male and female students from Colleges of Education?

This research question was answered by comparing the mean and standard deviation scores of the Igbo L₂ male and female students in the reading test as shown on Table 4.

Table 4: *Showing Mean and Standard Deviation Difference in the Performance of Igbo L₂ Male and Female Students in the Reading Test*

Sex	N	\bar{X}	SD
Male	30	17.73	10.84
Female	38	15.34	12.77

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation difference in the performances of Igbo L₂ male and female students in the reading test. The male students achieved higher mean score than the females in the reading test. However, the difference between the males' and females' mean scores is negligible.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant mean difference between the reading achievement scores of the Igbo L₂ male and female students from Colleges of Education.

The hypothesis was tested using t-test analysis as shown on table 5.

Table 5

T-test analysis of the difference in the reading achievements of the Igbo L₂ male and female students.

Sex	N	\bar{X}	SD	Tcal	Tcrit	Df	Alpha level	Result
Male	10	17.73	10.84	0.81	2.00	66	.05	Not significant
Female	38	15.34	12.77					

From table 5 above, the calculated t value is 0.81, which is less than the critical t value of 2.00 at 66 degree of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant mean difference between the reading achievements of the Igbo L₂ male and female students is retained.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to assess the reading efficiency of the Igbo L₂ learners from Colleges of Education located in the Northern, Western and Southern parts of Nigeria. It compared the mean reading

achievements of the Igbo L₂ learners from the three locations as well as the mean reading achievements between the Igbo L₂ male and female students from the Colleges of Education.

The results from Table 1 shows that students from the Northern location had higher mean score than those from the West and South in the reading test. The mean score difference between the West and the South are negligible while that of the North is significantly higher than the other two. Accordingly, the results of the ANOVA test show a significant difference in the reading achievements among the groups. The Post Hoc Tests revealed that students from the North did better than students from the West and also better than the students from the South. However, the comparison between the students from South and the West revealed no significant mean difference. This result deviates from speculations. Again, no one would think that students from colleges located far North would achieve better reading in the target language than students from locations contiguous with Igbo speaking states like the West and the South. It was expected that students from locations most remote to the target language (like the North) would lack environmental support, opportunity to interact with more advanced speakers of the target language as well as lack access to variety of reading materials in the target language. The nearest consideration to this result is that however remote the North is to the Igbo speaking states, there are more Igbo (people) residing in the Northern Nigeria, working and doing businesses there than can be found in the other locations. This could facilitate environmental support and interaction with more advanced speakers and peers which Lightbrown and Spida (1999) say, facilitates second language proficiency. It can also facilitate both conscious and unconscious encounter with reading materials in the target language like inscriptions on houses, vehicles etc than is experienced by students from the Western and Southern locations.

Although, results from table 4 show that the Igbo L₂ male students achieved slightly higher mean score than the females, the results from the t-test analyses show no significant difference between the male and female students' achievements in the reading test. Therefore, the mean difference between the male and female students' achievements in the reading test occurred purely by chance and also quite negligible. This result reveals, that sex did not influence the achievements of the students in the reading tests are strange. This is because several researches cited in the literature have favored females in linguistic performance. The implication is that males have apparently realized the prospects in making a career in language studies.

Conclusion

The study assessed the reading achievements of the Igbo second language (L₂) learners in selected colleges of education in Nigeria. It compared the reading achievements of the Igbo L₂ students from colleges located in the Northern, Western and Southern Nigeria. From the findings of this work, it can be concluded that location plays a role in the development of reading competence among the students. The ability to read in second language is more difficult to acquire than the speaking ability. However, students who learn a second language at locations with comparative advantage such as good environmental support, access to variety of reading materials would certainly do well.

Furthermore, sex is certainly not a barrier in second language learning. For those who learn a second language for academic purposes like the Igbo L₂ students who are expected to acquire reasonable competence as to be able to teach the language in primary and junior secondary school in the absence of a trained L₁ teacher as well be able to pass NCE well as to pursue further studies in the target language, it is not only pertinent but imperative that they acquire reading competence. This is required of them irrespective of their sex.

The findings of this study have significant implications to all the stakeholders in the business of language education vis-à-vis, the students, teachers, curriculum planners, text book writers and of course, the

government. If good time is devoted to the teaching of reading, it would benefit the students. Application of variety of reading strategies and use of diverse materials would help break monotony and sustain the interest of the Igbo L₂ learners. Again, there is dearth of good Igbo L₂ texts. Reading in second language will continue to be a herculean task for the L₂ students until text book writers begin to develop readable texts that are purely for Igbo L₂ pedagogy like the ones produced in French for FFL programme.

Teachers do not go extra mile in sourcing texts for class use. Production of teachers-made handbooks that would reflect the students' background and experience as well as match their natural order will make significant impact on the students' progress in reading. It is important that L₂ students develop independent reading habit knowing that little or no progress can be made in second language learning without substantial competence in reading.

Recommendations

- The students' performance in the reading tests was generally poor. This has implications. It is either that the curriculum is faulty i.e. skewed in favor of oral proficiency at the expense of reading competence or that the teachers lack the capacity to deliver in the teaching of reading. It is therefore recommended that more efforts be directed to the teaching of reading.
- Although communicative competence is highly emphasized in L₂ curriculum, it is important it is reviewed to cater for the desired competence in reading. There is the need to expand the reading content thereby balance the competences of speaking and reading in the beneficiaries of the programme.
- Many teachers in the L₂ programme received little or no training in L₂ methodology and instructional delivery which differ significantly from the L₁. It is therefore recommended that the teachers be retrained and adequately equipped for proper delivery of L₂ curriculum.

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