

THE COMPARATIVE DISPARITY IN ORAL ENGLISH AMONGST STUDENTS OF URBAN AND RURAL AREAS IN RIVERS STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

IDOLI, NWACHUKWU BEN AND UMMANAH, PIUS COSMOS

(Received 28, July 2010; Revision Accepted 9, August 2010)

ABSTRACT

The researcher investigated the comparative disparity in Oral English amongst students of urban and rural areas in Rivers State secondary schools. To guide the study, two research questions were formulated for testing. Eighty (80) students were sampled from eight (8) secondary schools, four (4) from rural areas and four (4) from urban areas in Rivers State. For the purpose of data collection, a questionnaire named COMDOEAS was designed by the researcher. Data was analyzed using independent t-test and one way analysis of variance. Results indicated significance and non-significance on the part of school location and teachers qualification respectively. The research questions were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the results, four (4) recommendations were drawn.

KEY WORDS: Comparative, Disparity, Qualification, Location and Oral English

INTRODUCTION

English language L₂ is the language of the British people. There are two universally known types of English language namely, written and spoken English languages. Each of these types is significant. Oral English belongs to the spoken type of English language and it is equally important. Fundamental to its importance, it has been incorporated in the curriculum of secondary schools and made compulsory for all students to learn in order to ensure desired skill in speech production.

However, there is a lot to learn in order to be skillful in speech production. The organs of speech need to be learnt and known. This will enable learners know which organ is responsible, the region and how the speech is articulated and produced. In other words, they could know what organ of speech combined with the other to produce such speech or speeches.

Furthermore, the vowel sound and its branches like the monophthongs, diphthongs and the triphthongs can not be left out. Also, the consonant sounds must come to play.

Subsequent to this, the Ministry of Education is very serious and particular about English teachers in the secondary schools. They need teachers who are not just teachers of English language but teachers who are teachers of English language with vigorous skills to teach the subject in order to achieve their goal. Frantic efforts have been made to ensure the supply of the needed and marchable textbooks and materials for the effective teaching of this subject. All over the state, schools are being renovated and built for the security of conducive classrooms and good learning environments, since the inception of Governor Rotimi Amaechi's government. This is because it is expected that an educated person be able to speak well to raise no doubt.

The teaching, learning, mastery and achievement of the subject now depend solely on the teachers and the learners. If both parties devote time and effort to attend classes, teach and learn the subject, they will definitely strike an achievable learning and then, the desired goal would have been accomplished.

Idoli, Nwachukwu Ben, Department Of Educational, Admin And Planning, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Ummanah, Pius Cosmos, Department Of Educational, Admin And Planning, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Basically, there are four language skills; namely – listening, speaking, reading and writing. The primary form of language use is speech. Today, in our society speech has become an essential or yardstick for social standard. The educated persons in our society may be in problem if they do not indicate as a matter of fact that they are truly educated through the manifestation of good speech. Therefore, no matter the area of specialization, an educated person is expected to speak well.

It is in recognition of the need to speak well and achieve efficiency in communication that a major emphasis of compulsion is placed on Oral English in the Nigerian school system. Hence, according to Daniel (2000), Oral English is simply spoken English.

The importance of Oral English cannot be over-emphasized. It is actually inexhaustible. Daniel (2000) posits that:

1. The study of Oral English enables us to speak better because through it, we can identify the sounds of English language and how the sounds are combined in speech.
2. Oral English helps us to attain mutual intelligibility in speech by recognizing and using a common sound system.
3. It also helps or enables us to have insight into the trend of the development of English language.
4. Oral English is useful to speech pathologists in their expertise to study speech defects.
5. Basically, it is essential to those in the field of teaching, in fact, to teachers and media employees, mass communication, etc.
6. Important to stress still is the fact that Oral English has become increasingly recognized as a prominent academic field. This is consequent upon its recognition by examining bodies such as the WAEC and NECO.
7. Oral English is interesting and rewarding.

We need Oral English without having to be reminded. In Nigeria, we acquire English language, called and known as the second language (L_2). This implies that most speakers acquire English in addition to their mother-tongue, called and known as the first language (L_1). This, however, may create mother tongue interference problem. Hence, the Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, Izon and other users of English language encounter various articulatory problems as they

make efforts to speak English language. It is easy sometimes to identify someone else's tribe by the betrayal of the person's accent. However, there are users of English in Nigeria whose accent does not reveal their ethnic nationalities. They speak educated Nigerian English. It is proper and needful then to learn Oral English very well in order to overcome certain speech impediments and attain national, as well as international intelligibility.

However, Oral English is not without technicalities. These technicalities are stemmed from the numerous components that make up approved or oral or spoken English. Some of these components are as follows: Phonetics, phonology, organs of speech, vowel sounds and consonant sounds.

Observably, Nigerian learners of English pronunciation have difficulties. According to Sam (1997), the process of speech production starts from the lungs which serve as the power house from which the air flows. As air flows from the lungs to mouth in the production of speech, a speaker of English exerts greater effort in the pronunciation of sounds and invariably words. Such sounds and words pronounced energetically are said to be stressed while the others are unstressed syllables but such distinction is not made in most Nigerian languages.

Since sentences in English contain both stressed and unstressed syllables, there is usually a rise and fall in voice pitch as one speaks and this gives the language a peculiar rhythmic pattern. In sentence also, stressed syllables occur at regular intervals and because of this, English is called a stress-timed language. In many Nigerian languages, unlike what happens in English, syllables and words are pronounced with the same relative breathe effort. Since these syllables apparently have the same prominence in speech, the Nigerian languages are called syllable-timed languages. The difference between the stress-timed English language and the syllable-timed Nigerian languages creates some difficulty for learners of English pronunciation.

It is apparently seen that both the teacher of this aspect of the English language and the learners must exert effort to ensure fluency is achieved, whether in the Urban or Rural areas. However the unfortunate situation is the undesirable performance of students in Oral English which is attributable to school location and teachers' qualification. This paper therefore

wishes to assess Comparative Disparity in Oral English Amongst Students of Urban and Rural Areas in River State Secondary Schools.

Statement of The Problem

As part of English language, Oral English is compulsorily studied by all students in secondary school. The curriculum guiding the study of this subject is made available by the Ministry of Education for both rural and urban schools. The scheme of work guiding the teachers of this subject is also made available in just no different way to all schools.

But it is disappointing and appalling to understand that people pass positive results in favour of the students in the urban areas to be better in the knowledge and understanding of the subject than their counterparts in the rural areas. The question is, what is the comparative disparity? This is what the work is out to investigate.

Research Question:

1. How does educational qualification of English language teachers influence disparity in oral English?
2. To what extent does school location influence disparity in oral English?

Literature Review

Educational qualification and students' disparity in oral English

Potential teachers need a type of education that can equip them with skills that are adaptable and flexible for employment. Research findings by Ipaye (1990) reveals that in a technological society, which Nigeria is aspiring to become, what is basic to successful performance in one's job is best taught within formal educational framework. The researcher noted that educational qualifications become the crucial ladder to teachers' job performance. Sansawai (1995) asserted that professional training among others contributes immensely to teachers' effectiveness or lack of training to teachers' ineffectiveness and these manifest in students' disparity. Yoloye (1992) in support of this view asserts that a teacher is not actually a teacher without a requisite professional qualification. Professional training brings additional knowledge to the teacher in that all the skills he needs to impart to the learners must be given to him while in training if he must function effectively as a teacher. A man does not know what he does not learn, hence without additional

professional training; a teacher will produce students with poor disparity in oral English.

Odigbo (1990) researched on educational attainment and teachers' effectiveness. He used a sample size of two hundred and forty (240) teachers with a survey inferential research design. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis, he found that the proper approach to safety in the languages is through training. He stressed that such training involves acquiring more knowledge and higher qualification. According to him, it is not safe to assume that a teacher in front of the English Language class is qualified to teach the subject. He suggested that teaching certificate should clearly state the level to which the teacher is qualified to teach for effective understanding of the subject. For instance, a Bachelor of Education (Language) Certificate should specify whether the holder is capable of teaching 'A' level students or not.

Ndoma (2004) investigated the relationship between educational qualification and disparity of students in Chemistry. His sample was 180 respondents drawn from teachers in 10 secondary schools in Calabar Municipality and 280 students from the same secondary schools. Using the survey design, a well validated research instrument and with correlation coefficient (r) analysis, he found a significant relationship between teachers educational qualification and their students' performance ($r=0.32$) showing that the more students are taught by competent teachers the better their disparity. In other words, they will possess slim or thin disparity so to say.

Ndoma's (2004) study in Calabar Municipality supported the findings of Odigbo. Both researchers agreed that specific educational qualification ensures that the students are taught by competent teachers and avoid a situation where a teacher is allocated a class which is beyond the scope of his/her training. This leads to lack of understanding of the subject by the students, thus, causing poor disparity.

Ndoma (2004) stressed that adequate number of well qualified and training arts teachers are essential if English is to be taught properly in our secondary schools. According to him, unqualified teachers are those without the appropriate qualification and training to teach English Language. It is not only undesirable but also represents a real threat to the safety of children in the language department.

School location and students' disparity in oral English

Chinapah (1995) in his study in five countries (China, Jordan, Mali, Mauritius and Morocco) found out that there is disparity in oral English between students from urban centers and students from rural centers

The finding of Agborbechem (2003) carried out a project on the influence of students' perception of mathematics and their disparity in secondary schools in South West Province of Cameroon. In this study he categorized the secondary schools into three locations urban, semi urban and rural areas. The study revealed that there exist a high differential in students' disparity with regard to school location. Specifically, the study revealed that students from urban centers had higher perception in Mathematics than their counterparts from rural areas.

Mosha (1999) sought to identify factors affecting the quality of secondary education in five regions in Tanzania by extensive review of literature and empirical data. The study was restricted to three districts in each region –one urban, one semi urban and one rural. Available record and questionnaire used to collect data from parents and school leavers. Observational achieve tests for general local knowledge, and a battery of ability tests were administered on 300 pupils in each district. Analysis of the overall disparity revealed that disparity was better in

urban schools where qualified teachers and equipment were found than schools from rural areas. Analysis of variance and regression for individual and disparity variables revealed that disparity in general knowledge and English language depend very much on the district where the school they attend is located. The students in the urban schools have disparity with students in schools in rural areas in all the courses especially English language.

Methodology:

The research design adopted for this study is the survey research design. The survey research is the ideal way of collecting information when the units of analysis are human beings (Bernstain, 1979).

The sampling procedure adopted for the study is stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The reason is to enable a fair representative of the respondents from the various educational zones selected for the study. Through these procedures 80 students were selected from 8 secondary schools; 4 from rural areas and 4 from urban areas in Rivers State. Data about the qualification of various English teachers handling the classes used for the study was obtained from the various schools. An Oral English test was administered to the students. Data collected was analyzed using independent t-test and one way analysis of variance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research Question One:

How does educational qualification of English language teachers influence the disparity in oral English?

One way analysis of variance of the influence of teachers' qualification on students' disparity in Oral English

Teacher qualification	N	Mean	SD	ΣX
NCE/HND	23	12.74	2.13	
B.Ed/B.Sc./BA	35	13.82	2.04	
M.Ed/MSc./MA	15	14.54	1.82	
Ph.D	7	18.89	1.16	
Total	80	14.99	1.17	

Source of variation	SS	d.f	MS	F-ratio
Between group	152.23	3	50.73	2.78
Within group	1385.89	76	18.24	
Total	1538.12	79		

P>0.05, d.f = (3, 76), critical F=3.14

The result in Table 1 revealed that the calculated F-value of 2.78 was found to be smaller than the critical F-value of 3.14 needed for significance at 0.05 level of significant with 3 and 76 degrees of

freedom. With this result, teachers' qualification does not influence students' disparity in Oral English.

Research Question Two:

To what extent does school location influence disparity in oral English?

Independent t-test analysis of the influence of location on students' disparity in Oral English

Location	N	Mean	S.D	t-cal
Rural	40	13.0500	2.36372	2.05
Urban	40	14.0250	1.86035	

*P< 0.05, d.f= 78, critical t= 1.68

The result in table 2 indicates that the calculated t-value of 2.05 was found to be greater than the critical t- value of 1.68 needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level of significance with 78 degrees of freedom. With this result, it therefore implies that there exist disparity in Oral English between urban and rural students in Rivers State Secondary Schools.

Discussion of Results:

Teachers' qualification and students' disparity in Oral English

The results of this finding show that teachers' qualifications do not significantly influence students' disparity in Oral English. These findings are highly not supported by the findings obtained by Sansa-wai (1991) who

asserts that professional training of teachers, among others contributes immensely to the teachers' effectiveness, which in turn contributes to little or no disparity among the students. Not in support to the findings of this study and not in corroboration of Sansa-wai's view, Yolo (1992) posits that a teacher is not actually a teacher without requisite professional qualification. This, he continues, is because professional training brings additional knowledge to the teacher, as all the skills he needs for imparting ideas to students are given to him while in training. Furthermore, he notes that without additional higher qualification and professional training, a teacher will produce students with disparity.

School location and students' disparity in Oral English in Rivers State

The result of this finding revealed that school location significantly influence students' disparity in Oral English with students from urban centers performing better than students from rural centers. This result is in agreement with the finding arrived by Chinapah (1995) who found in his study in five countries (China, Jordan, Mali, Mauritius and Morocco) that students from urban centers have disparity in Oral English Language with students from rural centers. Most often qualified English language teachers are found in the urban areas more than the rural areas; as such students from the urban areas are taught properly which greatly influence the way they speak.

The finding of Agborbechem (2003) is also in corroboration with the finding of this study. He carried out a project on the influence of students' perception of mathematics and their disparity in secondary schools in South West Province of Cameroon. In this study he categorized the secondary schools into three, urban, semi urban and rural areas. The study revealed that there exist a high differentials in students disparity with regard to school location. Specifically, the study revealed that students from urban centers had higher perception in Mathematics than their counterparts from rural areas.

CONCLUSION:

Oral English as part of English language obviously forms the speech making or spoken English. It is a compulsory subject in Nigeria Educational system. This is due to its importance and needs to the learner in particular and the society in general

Subsequently, it is expected that an educated person be able to speak well to avoid doubt and suspicion through the skill of Oral English acquired. Unfortunately, it is very disappointing that learners of Oral English in schools in urban areas are more exposed to the knowledge and understanding of Oral English than their counterparts in the rural areas as instrumented by the location of the schools and conducive environment of learning. However, with this discovery, it is hoped that with time, the learners in the rural areas will overcome this challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the light of the above, the following recommendations have been put in place:

1. That the government should recruit teachers of Oral English who are professionals to teach the subject in schools.
2. That they, as a follow up be able to inspect and supervise the teachers so recruited for the purpose of efficiency.
3. That quiz competition for the schools on Oral English be conducted quarterly and award and reward given to successful learners for both urban and rural schools. This will pose challenges on the weak and uninterested students or learners in Oral English.
4. That schools in the rural areas be made conducive like those in the urban areas-electrification, water, quarters, library, laboratory etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

- Adesanya, F., 2003. *Introducing phonetics and phonology*. Port-Harcourt: Seivad Ventures.
- Agborbechem, P., 2003. *The teacher in the public schools*. Ibadan: Ibadan University press
- Akpan, E. E., 2004. *Topics in developmental psycholinguistics: An introductory textbook*. Calabar: Paico Press and Books.
- Alo, M. A., 1995. *Applied English linguistics*. Port Harcourt: Aedy Link.

- Bernstein, R. A., 1979. An introduction to political science methods. Engle Wood Cliffs: Prentice Hall International Incorporated.
- Crystal, D., 1991. A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics, 3rd Edition, Basil Blackwell.
- Daniel, N. O., 2000. Oral English textbook: English speech guide for Nigerian schools and colleges. Port Harcourt: Abe Publishers.
- Donwa-Ifode, S., 1995. Basic phonetics. Port Harcourt sunray.
- Ipaye, H., 1990. Teaching aids and resources, Lagos: Nelson publishers limited
- Landefoge, P., 1982. A course in phonetics. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Ndoma, A., 2004. Revising teachers' characteristics and students achievement. Journal of social behaviour & personality, 20, (6)69-80
- O'Cosmor, J. D., 1980. Better English pronunciation. Cambridge: Up
- Odigbo, S. I., 1990. The impact of teachers' professional qualification on role enactment: a qualitative analysis. American Educational Research Journal 11,(9) 266-271.
- Odigbo, S., 1997. Oral English for schools and colleges. Onitsha: African Fep publishers Limited.
- Sansawai, B., 1995 Teachers' experience and classroom management in Cross River State. Journal of education research 1 (1) 45-47
- Wester Mann, D. and Ida, C. Ward, 1990. Practical phonetics for students of African languages. London and New York: Kegan Paul Int.
- Yoloye, G., 1992. Classroom management for effective teaching of environmental education in pedagogy of environmental education. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria publishers.
- Yul-Ifode, Shirley (2008). Basic phonetics. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.