

Language Skills Acquisition as Determinants of Junior Secondary School Students' Performance and Self-Efficacy in English Language

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Abstract: This study investigates the acquisition of language skills as determinants of Junior Secondary School Student's competence and good performance in the use of English language in Ado Local Government. The purpose of the study is to identify the extent of students' performance in English language, determine the impacts of language skills acquisition on students' language delivery and to determine the impacts of language skills acquisition on students in English language as a tool of wider communication in Nigeria. The study employs the use of descriptive research of the survey type. The sample consists of 200 Junior Secondary School students in Ado Local Government. A well constructed questionnaire was administered to obtain information on relevant areas from the students. The findings reveal that without a good acquisition of the language skills, students would not have a good grasp of what is being taught in the class nor would they be able to participate meaningfully in any activity. It was therefore recommended that students should be exposed to tasks that will build their language skills.

Keywords: Language Skills, Acquisition, Self-Efficacy, Proficiency, Receptive, Productive, Competence, Performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the ability to acquire and articulate the complex systems of communication through a conglomeration of signs and symbols based on tacit agreement within a speech community (Babalola & Ogunlade, 2015). This system of communication has great potentials to enable human beings to exchange ideas and express desire. Communication is the exchange of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium. It is a means of sending and receiving information. According to Obateru (2018) Communication is the basic principle of human relation. It is the fundamental of human existence as human beings need to interact in one way or the other. Communication is a two-way traffic; we have the encoder and the decoder or in other words the transmitter and the receiver. An encoder sends a series of codes using the ability to speak or write while the decoder interprets these codes to make sense using the listening ability or the reading ability. It is important to be proficient in a language for effective communication to take place, proficiency in a language means competency in the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The ability to convey a message or to receive a message effectively is communication and to communicate effectively, you need to learn the basic language skills. Communication is essential to human endeavours, it is a

central activity of human existence (Babalola & Shittu, 2015). Whenever communication breaks down, people in the organization will suffer due to the breakage in communication. This indicates various means by which messages are received, stored, and used as guided by rules, customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and events.

It is appalling that despite the importance of language skills many students do not have strong acquisition of the skills. Their language skills seem to be strongly rooted with that of their native language while they struggle with that of English language. It appears that students have strong acquisition of the natural skills; listening and speaking skills in their native language but that of English language suffers. Likewise, their learnt skills are rooted in English language while that of the native language suffers, this can be because the natural language skills are acquired naturally from the environment as a result of unhindered interaction with it, but the learnt skills, reading and writing are learnt in schools. Babalola and Awodun (2015) opine that if English language is valued because of its utilities in our linguistic environment, then the most vital skills of it in listening, speaking, reading and writing must be sincerely taught in all our schools in order to promote meaningful literacy level.

The researchers observed that English as Second Language (ESL) speakers find it difficult to speak fluently as English native speakers do, nor do they pronounce the words correctly. ESL students find it hard to engage in authentic communication using the right words because they have poor vocabulary repertoire. They lack communicative competence, for this reason they shy away from classroom engagement. Kajal (2019) believes that a student may be said to have good communication and effective interpersonal skills only when these four skills seamlessly blend together. Babalola and Awodun (2015) were of the opinion that English language has generated to itself a number of motivational values for the citizens: a citizen who desires to occupy an enviable position in the society, must compulsorily be proficient in the different uses of the language. one's language competency determines his admission into schools, appointment and promotion.

Students find it difficult to comprehend written text unless they read extensively. They find it difficult to write grammatically correct sentence as well as some use punctuation marks

inappropriately and find it difficult to use words fit for the context they are writing on. Then, one common thing is that they translate directly from their first language.

There are clear indications of students' weakness in English language, as students are unable to speak English and their ability to comprehend and understand written texts is also weak (Minshar, 2020). In addition, students are weak in understanding conversations they listen to in English and are weak in their written expressions.

A study conducted by Fakeye (2014) on Nigerian students shows a significant correlation between English language proficiency and academic performance. Another study shows that Iranian students, that majored in English Language and Literature, who scored higher on language proficiency tests also had higher grade point average (GPA) scores (Sahragard, Baharloo, & Soozandehfar, 2011).

Researchers have also reported that students who lack proficiency in English language skills face difficulty when interacting with their teachers and peers (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010). Some studies carried out by some renowned researchers, however, show that international students do better than their domestic counterparts despite the difficulty encountered in English language (Faus-Holmes and Vaughn, 2015).

Language Skills and Students' Performance

Language skills enable a speaker to convey ideas with precision. According to Harappa (2021), language skills are communication skills that help you convey your ideas clearly and precisely. Not only do you learn to speak fluently, but also to listen carefully. Language skills are different aspects of using a language, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A language is designed around those basic skills which are necessary for full and comprehensive communication experience.

Language is absolutely central to learning; without it, one cannot make sense or communicate one's understanding of a subject. One needs to develop the language skills in order to understand and make the most effective use of learning materials, develop the specialised language and vocabulary relevant to one's discipline, interpret assignment questions and select relevant and appropriate material for response, write well-structured and coherently presented assignment without plagiarism, communicate one's needs to the teachers and work productively with peers (The Open University, 2021).

Developing these skills will help the users of a language to become an effective communicator and build his proficiency in the language. These language skills are acquired in chronological order, with a speaker acquiring the ability to listen first, then to speak, and then to read and then to write.

As submitted by Child Success Center (2019) that at all levels of education, students must be able to communicate effectively. Without well-developed communication skills, students run the risk of falling behind their peers or becoming emotionally overwhelmed or withdrawn at school. Academic success

depends on solid communication skills, beginning with clear oral communication. Students are often called upon in the class to answer questions. These questions may range from those with simple factual answers to questions that involve putting thoughts together and making arguments. Answers to questions need to be communicated effectively so teachers can assess a student's knowledge. Students with oral challenges may also become embarrassed if they are unable to communicate with their peers. If a student stutters or mumbles they may become fearful of speaking up in class and this can lead to lowered grades and his self-esteem can decline.

Receptive vs Productive language skills

Languages are generally taught and assessed in terms of the 'four skills': listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are known as 'receptive' skills while speaking and writing are known as 'productive' skills. Initially, when learning a new language, learners tend to develop and acquire the receptive skills before learning the productive skills. For the natural skills, the learner acquires the listening skill first while for the learnt skills the learner learns the reading skill first.

Sheth (2015) believes that receptivity is the most common human trait as it occurs at birth itself; the child begins to take in different impressions through his senses. The ability to listen is essential to human growth and development, from birth through the years of formal education. The better developed these language skills are the more productive students' learning endeavours will be.

Listening is the ability to understand meaning. When someone speaks you understand what he says. Listening successfully usually ends with the listener asking follow-up questions about the speaker's intent. A good listener actively understands and engages in what the speaker is trying to convey. A good listener gives a complete attention during a discussion and his understanding generates questions in order to build the body of knowledge.

Another receptive skill is reading, reading is the ability to comprehend the written text. It pertains to a person's ability to read, comprehend, interpret and decode written language and texts. A thinking under the influence of the printed page can be considered to be a psycholinguistic predicting game. It must be recognized that reading is a complex skill that is to say it involves a whole series of physical and psychological inter-networking procedures. According to Bojovic (2010) reading skill is a cognitive ability which a person is able to use when interacting with the written text. Reading skills involve identifying word meaning, drawing inferences, identifying writer's techniques and finding answers to questions. Decoding, fluency and vocabulary skills are key to reading comprehension. A reader is able to connect ideas within sentences to be able to understand or comprehend the written text. When one reads, one takes time to understand what the author is conveying with his words.

On one hand, listening and reading are receptive (but not passive) decoding skills aiming at understanding; on the other, speaking and writing are productive, encoding skills. But there is less disparity and more parity among them. Reading and listening require complete attention. Also, Listening is a lot more than simply hearing what someone is saying. There is a big difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is when you don't really register the words or the words are not registered in your vocabulary bank, instead you nod and smile while your mind drifts away from what the speaker is saying, likewise reading, when the reader does not have a good number of registered vocabulary, he will find it very hard to comprehend the written text.

Speaking skills allow us to communicate effectively. It is the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand, hence, the productive skill. Speaking is an interactive process where information is shared and acted upon by the listener. A speaker should be able to communicate clearly and concisely to draw the attention of the listener. Developing your speaking skills will involve gaining fluency in spoken interactions with others, as well as practicing your pronunciation.

It is the means through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints. In addition, people who understand a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language. Furthermore, in almost any setting, speaking is the most frequently used language skill. (College, Ain Shams University women's, 2006).

The Oxford Learner Dictionary (2012) states that speaking is to express or communicate opinions, feelings, ideas, etc., by or as talking and it involves the activities in the part of the speaker as psychological (articulator) and physical (acoustic) stage.

Speaking is a basic skill that language learners should master with the other language skills. It is defined as a complex process of sending and receiving messages through the use of verbal expressions, but it also involves nonverbal symbols such as gestures and facial expressions (Nezhadmehr & Reza Shahidy, 2014).

As in your first language, your writing will be improved by becoming a critical *reader* - try to think actively about how texts are structured and what kinds of phrases or vocabulary are used for different purposes (e.g., introducing a topic, describing, comparing and contrasting, writing conclusions).

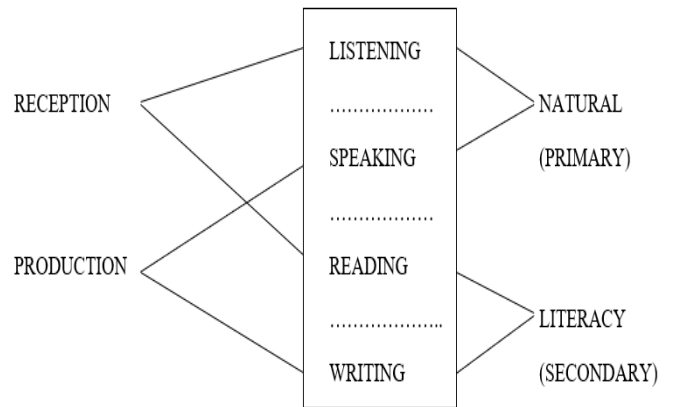
Inter-relationship between the Language Skills

In language acquisition, the child initially learns the ability to listen, which requires the adult to speak to the child while the child listens. The aspect of listening in response to word identification and discriminations requires the adults to speak to the child and the child to listen. Curiosity piques the interest of the child when his mother speaks or when adults speak. This curiosity also creates the motivation that the child uses later to repeat the words they have heard. After the child has spent

several months listening attentively to the language of the adults, he now attempts to repeat what he has heard. The child discovers that in order to meet his needs, it is required to trust other people and communicate with them. In order to fulfil this desire, he needs words for proper expression.

Learning to read and write is developmental. The child does not suddenly learn to read, first, his listening comprehension is nurtured, then his ability to speak. The child acquires these skills in a school setting, which is why they are referred to as learned skills.

These four language skills form the building blocks of effective and efficient communication.



LANGUAGE SKILLS INTER-RELATIONSHIP (Adopted, Lawal, 1991)

Listening and speaking are the primary or natural skills through which a child acquires the first language or mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment, mostly in the familiar context of the home. The natural language skills are the foundation of literacy. Through listening and speaking, one communicates his thoughts, feelings, experiences, information and opinion as well as learn to understand himself and others.

The child proceeds to learn to read and write either in the language of the home or in a second or third language in the school, while still continuing developing skills of listening and speaking in one or more languages. The broken lines separating the four skills serve to indicate that they are inter-woven and none can easily be compartmentalised. Therefore, although reading and writing are the higher skills of literacy, they require for their learning and development a strong foundation in listening and speaking skills. Reading and writing are powerful skills required for communication and learning. they enable students to extend their knowledge and the use of language and at the same time increase their understanding of others, their experiences and personal satisfaction.

Reading provides students with means of exploring ideas, views and experiences of others. By using effective reading skill and strategies, students are able to construct meaning and develop thoughtful and critical interpretations of a variety of texts such as both short and novel, fiction and non-fiction.

Writing enables students to explore, shape and clarify their thoughts and as well communicate with others. By using effective writing strategies, students are able to discover and refine their ideas and revise with increasing confidence and skill.

The receptive language skills (listening and reading) are decoding skills while speaking and writing are both productive skills or encoding messages in the communicative process. It is at the heart of this inter-connection of the four language skills that lies the concept of language arts. The language skills must be tied together appropriately to make for meaningful and effective teaching and learning. For instance, effective speaking can be learnt through active and skillful listening. Oral composition can serve as foundation for written composition while a passage studied for listening or reading comprehension can be a model for students in subsequent written composition task.

Acquisition of oral language skills, listening and speaking within the child's first three years of life helps in the development of other communication skills, reading and writing (Ogunyemi 2005, Fani & Ghaeni, 2011, Snow 2016) and subsequently enhances higher achievement scores in school subjects. Listening and speaking enable students to explore ideas and concepts as well as understand and organize their experiences. One uses the natural language skills to learn, solve problems and reach goals. To become discerning, lifelong learners, students need to develop fluence and confidence in their oral language abilities. Students are open to more opportunities when they learn to listen and speak both formally and informally for a variety of purposes. According to Babalola and Awodun (2015) Speech aspect must be mainly emphasized as various language skills are been taught in their right orders. Speaking skill is productive and natural. Reading cannot occur without the ability to speak the language. Writing skill comes last in the order of language learning and language acquisition. None of these skills could be brushed aside as each has its unique social value. Nevertheless, the chronological occurrence of the skills has effect on the language pedagogy. Babalola and Awodun (2015) concluded that speaking is made prominent: listening is done to enhance speech as speech also controls the rate of speakers' performance in other language skills.

The Education Review Office (2017) of New Zealand reports that children's ability to communicate using oral language helps them learn more effectively and apply their learning through problem solving mechanism that addresses intellectual challenges using abstract symbols, analysis and synthesis. Ability to use language, symbols and text is a central competency in 21st century life.

Self-efficacy (Language Competence) and Students' Performance

Self-efficacy refers to the beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform behaviours at designated levels (Bandura, 1986, 1997), and it is said to have a measure of control over individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. In other words, the

beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and outcome of their efforts influence in great ways how they will behave.

Such self-system provides an individual the capacity to alter his environment and influences his subsequent performance. Therefore, the beliefs he has of himself is the key element in exercising control and personal efficacy. This affects behaviour in two ways; either he engages in tasks he feels competent and confident or avoidance of those that he feels contrary. Self-efficacy helps to determine how much effort, perseverance and resilience being put on a task. In other words, the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence and resilience. Self-efficacy determines the ways in which people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. It enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being and helps people to approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered (Wang, Harrison, Cardullo & Ling, 2018). Low self-efficacy causes individuals to shy away from difficult tasks and to see them as personal threats, which causes them to give up quickly (Bai, Chao & Wang, 2019). Self-efficacy also triggers emotional reactions. For example, individuals with low self-efficacy believe that a task is tough and hence build stress, depression and a narrow vision on how to solve problems. On the other hand, those with high efficacy would be more relaxed in solving difficult tasks.

Bandura (1997) notes four sources which affect the development of self-efficacy beliefs: a) mastery experience, (b) vicarious experience, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological states. People who have experienced successful performance in accomplishing a task, tend to have high self-efficacy, therefore past experiences play a vital role in developing self-efficacy beliefs. When learners observe their friend and peers perform successfully in class, they develop positive beliefs about their own capabilities in performing the task and hence this experience can enhance the learner's self-efficacy. Encouragement and positive feedback affect self-efficacy. Learners develop high self-efficacy concerning a specific task when they receive encouragement from mentors, advisors, or superiors who are valued for their expertise in the particular domain assessed. Lastly, physiological and emotional states such as fatigue and anxiety affect self-efficacy. Learners who have low anxiety during a task performance, feel at ease and tend to perceive the situation as pleasant, therefore they strengthen their self-efficacy beliefs.

There is a growing body of literature suggesting that self-efficacy contributes to language learning (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012; Sariçoban & Behjoo, 2016; Wang, Kim, Bai & Hu, 2014). In a reviewed study which included studies on self-efficacy in foreign-language learning, Raoofi et al. (2012) concludes that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of performance in reading and listening skills in particular and success in various learning tasks. If teachers can get the students to have repeated experiences of success, this can help students to foster positive beliefs about their abilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. Identify the extent of students’ performance in English language.
- ii. Determine the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ performance.
- iii. Determine the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ self-efficacy.

Research question

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. What is the extent of students’ performance in English language?
- ii. To what extent is the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ performance in English language?
- iii. To what extent is the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ self-efficacy?

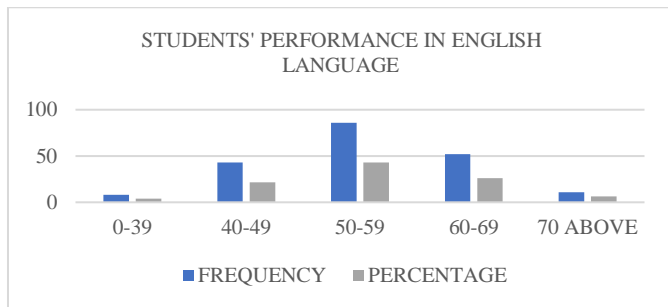
II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive design of a survey type. Information was collected through the administration of questionnaire. The population for this study consisted of all students in Junior Secondary School, class one (JSS3) in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State. The sample comprised of 200 students selected using stratified and simple random and sampling techniques. A researcher- designed questionnaire was used for gathering data for this study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A requested the respondents to indicate the name of their school, their gender, qualification (s) and years of experience. Section B consists of 15 item questions. The instrument was validated by experts in Institute of Education and Arts and Language Education Departments in Ekiti State University. A test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument using Pearson Product Moment Correlation on 50 students within 2 weeks interval. The data collected was analysed using mean scores and standard deviation.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the extent of students’ performance in English language?

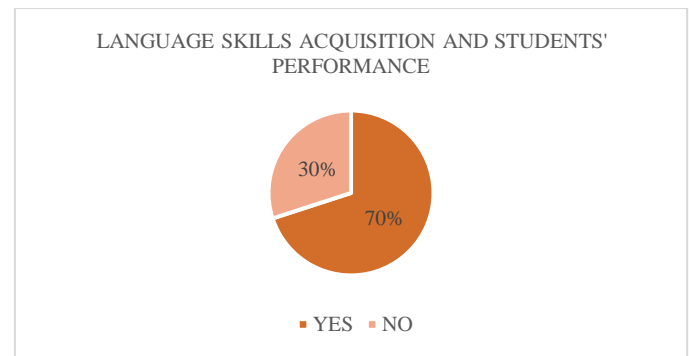
Table 1: Extent of students’ performance in English Language



Level of performance	F	%	Mean	SD
0-39	8	4.0	58.17	43.8
40-49	43	21.5		
50-59	86	43.0		
60-69	52	26.0		
70 and above	11	6.5		
Total	200	100.0		

Research Question 2: To what extent is the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ performance in English language?

Table 2: Frequency counts and percentage analysis of language skills acquisition and students’ performance in English language.

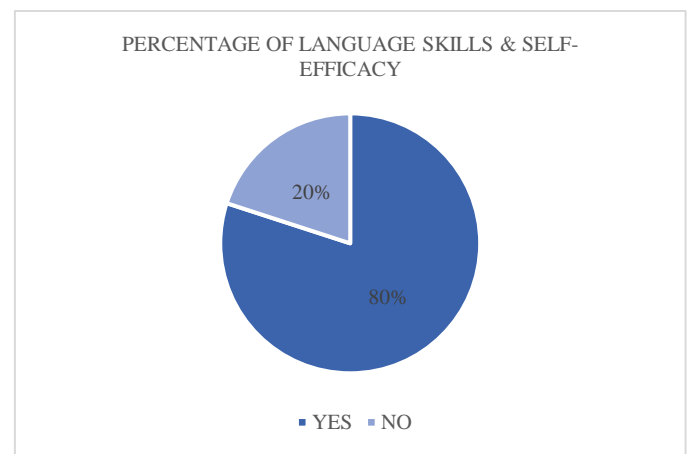


VARIABLES	N	%
YES	140	70.0
NO	60	30.0
TOTAL	200	100.0

Table 2 above shows that 70% of the respondents agreed that their acquisition of the language skills affect their performance in English Language while 30% disagreed.

Research Question 3: To what extent is the impacts of language skills acquisition on students’ self-efficacy?

Table 3: Frequency counts and percentage of language skills and self-efficacy.



VARIABLES	N	%
YES	160	80
NO	40	20
TOTAL	200	100.0

Table 3 above shows that 80% of the respondents agreed that their acquisition of language skills affect their self-efficacy while 20% of the respondents disagreed.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study revealed that language skills acquisition has influence and determine students' learning outcome in English language. Without a good acquisition of the language skills, students would not have a good grasp of what is being taught in the class, this is in line with The Open University (2021) that Language is absolutely central to your learning; without it, you cannot make sense or communicate your understanding of a subject. The findings also agreed with a study conducted by Fakeye (2014) on Nigerian students that there is a significant correlation between English language proficiency and students' academic performance. This implies that students' academic performance and activities rely on their strong acquisition of the language skills. The study also revealed that there is a relationship between the acquisition of language skills and students' self-efficacy. In other words, students' acquisition of the language skills determines their reactions towards learning of the language. The findings confirmed Raoofi, Tan & Chan, 2012 study that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of performance in reading and listening skills in particular and as well as other learning tasks.

V. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the acquisition of language skills as determiners of students' performance and self-efficacy in English language. A significant relationship was established between the acquisition of language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing and students' learning outcome in English language. Developing these skills help the students become an effective communicator and build their proficiency in the language. It was observed that students' academic performance depends on the solid acquisition of the language skills and high self-efficacy, without them students run the risk of falling behind their peers. Also, it was concluded that or becoming emotionally overwhelmed or withdrawn at school.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are drawn from this study;

1. Parents should give total support to their wards while learning a second language, especially the struggling ones.
2. Parents should also assist their wards in developing their language skills, and expose them to engaging tasks that will help them develop these skills.
3. Teachers should make learning experiences more engaging for students to build their interest in the

subject. They should also introduce methods of teaching that will assist the students in developing their language skills.

4. Schools should include effective teaching methods and curriculum that is structured around the learning styles of the students.
5. Schools should also make sure that their teaching methods and learning materials are up to standard.
6. Government should provide quality education for growing up children and expose them to the culture and language at every turn.
7. Teachers and parents should expose the students to tasks that will build their language skills right from young age.

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