

Exploring the Interplay of Language Attitudes and Learning Styles on English Language Proficiency among Secondary School Students in Oyo Town, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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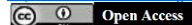
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Understanding the complex relationship between language attitudes, learning styles and English language proficiency is crucial for developing effective strategies to improve secondary school students' performance in Nigeria. The study investigated influence of language attitude and learning style on the proficiency of secondary school students in learning English language in Oyo town, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all secondary school students in Oyo Town, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that every student in the population had an equal chance of being selected. Ten schools were selected for the study, with 20 respondents chosen from each school, resulting in a total sample of 200 students. Questionnaire was used as the research instrument and validated by experts in education and linguistics. The coefficients obtained were as follows, language attitude and proficiency in English language questionnaire (0.93), and learning styles and proficiency in English language questionnaire (0.89). The data was analysed using Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and Regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that Language attitudes were negatively correlated with proficiency ($r = -0.14$, $p = 0.057$) and Learning styles did not significantly affect proficiency ($F(5,194) = 1.001$, $p > .05$). It was recommended among others that Schools should organize seminars to educate parents on the importance of their active involvement in supporting their children's language learning, particularly in English.

Keywords: Language Attitude, Learning Style, Proficiency in English language, and Oyo town

Introduction

English Language, the world over, occupies an inevitable position as a colonial linguistic and official language since the exit of British colonial administration. To countries colonized by the British, it has now become the language of Education, Judiciary, Trade, Religion and Social Class and by default, the lingua franca is relevance in the educational sector and even labour market singles it as the only language everybody cannot do without (Abioye, 2020). The English Language is an essential prerequisite for propelling educational wheel and it continues to be a medium of instruction, a compulsory and core subject that must be offered and passed at all levels of education in Nigerian educational system (Fakeye, 2010 and Olagbaju, 2024). By implication, students must be proficient in the spoken and written forms and inability to read and comprehend English Language will have adverse effects on the performance of students and the system of education in Nigeria (Fakeye, 2010).

The state of the English language education in Nigeria, including Oyo Town, mirrors a broader national issue. Although the Nigerian government mandates English as a core course in the secondary school curriculum, its implementation varies significantly across regions (Ogunyemi, 2020). In Oyo Town, the availability of qualified English teachers, teaching resources, and supportive learning

environments is inconsistent, leading to varying outcomes in students' proficiency. This inconsistency is compounded by Nigeria's multilingual nature, where students often speak indigenous languages alongside English (Ajayi, 2022).

Moreover, proficiency in English contributes to cognitive development and academic achievement. Research indicates that learning a second language, such as English, positively impacts cognitive functions, including problem-solving and memory (Zhang & Zhang, 2019). This cognitive benefit supports overall academic performance, as bilingual students often exhibit enhanced learning abilities and academic resilience. Thus, English language education plays a vital role in shaping well-rounded, academically successful students (Krasny & Tidball, 2019).

Language attitude is a crucial factor predicting success in learning English. Attitudes towards a language can be shaped by cultural perceptions, peer influence, and previous language learning experiences (Nweke & Ugochukwu, 2021). In Nigeria, where English and indigenous languages dominate, students' attitudes towards English can vary significantly. Positive attitudes are often associated with higher motivation and better learning outcomes, while negative attitudes can hinder progress. Parental attitudes towards education also impact students' motivation and success in learning languages. Positive parental attitudes towards multilingualism can lead to higher student motivation and better language outcomes (Gardner, 2018). The linguistic environment at home, including bilingualism, provides students with early exposure to multiple languages, enhancing their ability to learn new languages (Cummins, 2019).

Parental attitudes towards education also impact students' motivation and success in learning languages. Parental education levels further influence language learning outcomes, as educated parents are more likely to support their children's language education (Sylva et al., 2024). Peer interactions within the home, including conversations with siblings and extended family members, create a dynamic language learning environment, and enhances language development (Hoff, 2018). These factors collectively impact students' proficiency in English, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to address the various predictors of language learning.

Learning style also affects students' proficiency in the English. Learning styles refer to the preferred ways individuals absorb, process, and retain information (Kolawole & Ajibade, 2018). Some students may thrive with visual aids and interactive lessons, while others may benefit from auditory or kinesthetic methods. Understanding these preferences allows educators to tailor their teaching approaches, potentially improving language proficiency. Different learning styles can influence not only how students acquire language but also their proficiency levels. For example, research has shown that students who match their learning style with appropriate teaching methods often achieve better outcomes in language learning. Visual learners who engage with multimedia resources, auditory learners who practice listening skills, and kinesthetic learners who participate in interactive activities are likely to develop a more comprehensive understanding of French (Kolawole & Ajibade, 2018).

The interplay between language attitude and learning style creates a complex framework for understanding the English language learning. Research indicates that aligning these factors positively can lead to higher proficiency levels (Nweke & Ugochukwu, 2021). A supportive home environment can enhance positive language attitudes, while an appropriate learning style can improve instructional effectiveness. Misalignment among these factors can result in challenges and lower proficiency outcomes.

Despite the potential benefits of aligning these factors, challenges remain in the Nigerian context. In Oyo Town, for example, inadequate resources and training for teachers often limit their ability to address students' diverse needs effectively (Olaniyi, 2020). Socioeconomic disparities can exacerbate differences in home environments, further complicating efforts to improve language proficiency across

the student population. However, to improve English language education in Nigeria, a holistic approach is needed, addressing not only the curriculum and teaching methods but also the broader contextual factors influencing learning. This approach should include supporting teachers, engaging parents, and fostering positive attitudes toward English within the community (Adetunji, 2021). Creating a conducive learning environment for English can ultimately lead to higher proficiency levels among students.

The study is backed by Gardner's Theory of Language Learning, also known as the Socio-Educational Model which emphasizes the role of motivation and attitude in second language acquisition. According to Gardner, motivation in language learning is a combination of effort, desire to achieve the goal of learning a language, and favorable attitudes toward learning the language. This theory suggests that learners who are highly motivated and possess a positive attitude towards a language and its speakers are more likely to succeed in acquiring proficiency. Research by Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) supports Gardner's model, highlighting that motivation is a critical factor in determining the success of language learners. They argue that a positive attitude towards the language, its culture, and the learning process itself enhances a learner's ability to engage with and acquire the language. This study tends to assess how language attitude, and learning style influence the proficiency of secondary school students in learning the English language in Oyo Town, Nigeria

Statement of the problem

Despite the critical role of the English language proficiency in Nigeria, especially in Oyo Town, students' performance remains markedly below expectations. This situation highlights issues with current teaching methods and underscores the need to explore factors affecting the English language learning. Although English is a mandatory part of the secondary school curriculum, inconsistencies in implementation, along with insufficient resources, training, and support for teachers, contribute to the problem. Additionally, Nigeria's multilingual context, where students manage multiple languages, exacerbates the challenge of acquiring English. Key predictors such as students' language attitudes, and their learning styles significantly influence proficiency levels. Parental involvement and socioeconomic status impact students' attitudes and motivation, while mismatched learning styles and inadequate teaching strategies further hinder proficiency. This study aims to investigate these factors and their interactions to develop effective strategies for improving the English language proficiency among secondary school students in Oyo Town.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how language attitude, and learning styles influence the proficiency of secondary school students in learning the English language in Oyo Town, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. assess the relationship between students' language attitudes and their proficiency in English language.
2. evaluate the influence of socioeconomic status on students' proficiency in English language learning.
3. To identify the predominant language attitudes among secondary school students in Oyo Town and how these attitudes affect their learning of English.
4. If learning styles has effect on students' proficiency in English language acquisition

Research questions

Based on the specific objectives of the study, the following research questions are raised and answered to guide the conduct of the research:

1. What is the relationship between students' language attitudes and their proficiency in English language?
2. How does socioeconomic status related to students' proficiency in English language learning?

3. What are the predominant language attitudes among secondary school students in Oyo Town, and how do these attitudes affect their learning of English?

Hypothesis

Ho1: Learning styles do not have significant influence on students' proficiency in English language acquisition?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 872 junior secondary school student 2 (JSS 2) in the 64 public secondary school in Oyo Town, Oyo State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. The first stage involve the use of random sampling technique to select 10 public secondary schools. Then, 20 JSS 2 students were randomly selected from each of the 10 schools selected resulting in a total sample of 200 students. The study utilized a questionnaire as research instrument. The questionnaire addressed the language attitudes and learning styles. Each section contained structured items on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument also included a section for demographic data, such as age, gender, and parental education levels. The questionnaire was chosen because it allowed for the collection of quantitative data that could be easily analyzed to determine the relationships between variables.

The research instrument underwent content and face validation by experts in education and linguistics. A trial testing was conducted to determine the reliability of the instruments using Cronbach's Alpha. For this trial testing, the instrument was administered to respondents outside the scope of the study to ensure that the measurements generated by the questionnaire for the students were consistent. Four schools were sampled with forty (40) respondents for the instruments. The selected sampled schools and respondents had the same characteristics as the intended sampled population. The coefficients obtained were as follows: language attitude and proficiency in English language questionnaire (0.83), and learning styles and proficiency in English language questionnaire (0.88). Data collection was conducted over a period of two weeks. The researcher obtained permission from the selected schools to administer the questionnaire to students during school hours.

The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, ANOVA, T-test, and Regression analysis were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. These statistical techniques allowed the researcher to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables and to identify the most significant predictors of English language proficiency among the students.

Results

Research Questions 1: What is the relationship between students' language attitudes and their proficiency in English Language?

Table 1: Relationship between students' language attitudes and their proficiency in English Language Proficiency Correlations

		Language Attitude	Test Scores
Language Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	-.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.057
	N	200	200
Test Scores	Pearson Correlation	-.135	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.057	
	N	200	200

The descriptive analysis in Table 1 explores the relationship between students' language attitudes on their proficiency in English. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is -0.14 , indicating a weak negative relationship between language attitudes and English proficiency. However, the p -value of 0.057 is greater than the significance threshold of 0.05 , suggesting that the relationship is not statistically significant.

Research Questions 2: what is the relationship between socioeconomic status and students' proficiency in English language learning?

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of socioeconomic status and students' proficiency in English language learning
Correlations

		Socioeconomic Status	Test Scores
Socioeconomic Status	Pearson Correlation	1	$-.140^*$
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.048
	N	200	200
Test Scores	Pearson Correlation	$-.140^*$	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	
	N	200	200

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status and English language proficiency. The correlation coefficient (r) of $-.14$ with a p -value of $.048$ indicates a weak negative correlation between the two variables. While the relationship is statistically significant, the magnitude of the correlation suggests that socioeconomic status has a limited impact on students' English language proficiency.

Research Questions 3: What are the predominant language attitudes among secondary school students in Oyo Town, and how do these attitudes affect their learning of English?

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of predominant language attitudes among secondary school students in Oyo Town.

S/N	Language Attitude	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)	Mean (X)	Std. Dev.
1.	I enjoy learning English in school.	32.5	35.0	16.5	16.0	2.84	1.05
2.	I believe English is an important language to learn.	27.5	33.5	22.5	16.5	2.72	1.04
3.	I feel confident speaking English in class.	40.0	38.5	11.0	10.5	3.08	0.96
4.	I find English interesting to study.	17.5	25.5	34.0	23.0	2.38	1.03
5.	I want to become fluent in English.	26.5	29.5	25.0	19.0	2.64	1.07
6.	I believe English will be useful in my future career.	41.5	34.5	14.0	10.0	3.08	0.98
7.	Learning English will allow me to interact with more people.	29.0	37.5	18.5	15.0	2.81	1.02
8.	I feel motivated to do well in English exams.	27.0	28.0	18.5	26.5	2.56	1.15
9.	I enjoy practicing English outside the classroom.	30.0	40.5	20.5	9.0	2.92	0.93
10.	I find it easy to understand English vocabulary.	20.5	28.5	47.5	3.5	2.66	0.84
11.	I believe English is easy to learn.	9.0	15.5	29.0	46.5	1.87	0.98
12.	I am willing to put effort into improving my English.	12.5	17.0	20.5	50.0	1.92	1.08
13.	English language classes are enjoyable for me.	13.5	9.0	69.0	8.5	2.28	0.80



14.	I feel proud to learn English.	35.5	17.5	19.5	28.0	2.60	1.23
15.	English language skills will improve my opportunities.	35.5	18.0	25.5	21.0	2.68	1.16

Note. Responses: Strongly Agreed (4), Agreed (3), Strongly Disagreed (2), Disagreed (1). Mean score of items above the benchmark score of 2.50 is an indicator

Table 3 present the descriptive analysis of the insights into the predominant language attitudes of secondary school students in Oyo Town. The results are based on the mean scores and standard deviations of responses, with a benchmark score of 2.50 indicating positive attitudes. Among the items analyzed, some attitudes demonstrated strong positive perceptions, while others reflected moderate or negative tendencies. Firstly, students displayed a positive attitude toward their confidence in speaking English in class (Mean = 3.08, SD = 0.96) and their belief that English will be useful in their future careers (Mean = 3.08, SD = 0.98). These high mean scores indicate that students recognize the practical value of English and are confident in using the language in classroom settings. Similarly, enjoyment in practicing English outside the classroom scored a relatively high mean of 2.92 (SD = 0.93), suggesting that many students actively engage with the language beyond formal instruction.

In contrast, certain attitudes showed a lack of enthusiasm or difficulty with learning English. For instance, the item "I believe English is easy to learn" recorded the lowest mean score of 1.87 (SD = 0.98), reflecting significant challenges in mastering the language. Similarly, willingness to put in effort to improve English (Mean = 1.92, SD = 1.08) and finding English classes enjoyable (Mean = 2.28, SD = 0.80) scored below the benchmark, indicating limited motivation and enjoyment in English learning activities. Lastly, some attitudes exhibited moderate perceptions. While students generally believe that English improves opportunities (Mean = 2.68, SD = 1.16) and feel proud to learn the language (Mean = 2.60, SD = 1.23), these scores fall slightly above the benchmark, showing room for improvement. A notable attitude is the importance of English for interacting with more people (Mean = 2.81, SD = 1.02), which suggests moderate recognition of English as a global communication tool.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀₁: learning styles do not have significant influence on students' proficiency in English language acquisition?

Table 4: Analysis of Variance Test of learning styles and students' proficiency in English language acquisition.

ANOVA

Learning Style

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	469.505	5	93.901	1.001	.418
Within Groups	18194.475	194	93.786		
Total	18663.980	199			

$$P > 0.05$$

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to examine the impact of different learning styles on students' English language proficiency. The results indicate that there was no significant difference in English proficiency scores among students with different learning styles ($F(5,194) = 1.001$, $p > .05$). Hence, the learning styles do not significantly affect students' proficiency in English language acquisition.

Discussion

The descriptive analysis in Table 1 explores the relationship between students' language attitudes on their proficiency in English. The Pearson correlation coefficient indicating a weak negative

relationship between language attitudes and English proficiency. Hence, language attitudes do not have a significant impact on students' proficiency in English. This suggests that while students may hold positive or negative attitudes toward the language, these attitudes alone are not strong determinants of their proficiency levels. Such a result underscores the complexity of language learning, where factors beyond attitudes, such as teaching strategies, exposure, and practice, play more significant roles in shaping proficiency outcomes. This finding aligns with the notion of Son and Morrison (2018) that language learning success requires a multifaceted approach, incorporating both cognitive and environmental factors. Also, Shin and Park (2021) suggested that language acquisition is best supported through engaging and context-rich educational experiences, which foster both skill development and interest in the language. Educators should therefore focus on creating interactive learning opportunities that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing to build competence in English.

Table 2 revealed that the correlation coefficient indicates a weak negative correlation between the two variables. While the relationship is statistically significant, the magnitude of the correlation suggests that socioeconomic status has a limited impact on students' English language proficiency. This finding implies that socioeconomic status has a small but significant influence on students' proficiency in English language learning. These results align with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, which suggests that the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic performance may depend on the access to and utilization of resources that foster educational development, rather than income or social position alone. Also, the findings are consistent with the work of Mottet et al. (2020), who observed that while socioeconomic factors contribute to disparities in language acquisition, their influence is often moderated by institutional and environmental variables. The weak correlation may also point to an increasingly equitable access to language learning resources, such as digital platforms and educational programs, which mitigate the direct effects of socioeconomic disadvantages. This underscores the importance of focusing on pedagogical strategies and educational support to bridge proficiency gaps, particularly in diverse learning contexts.

Table 3 present the descriptive analysis of the insights into the predominant language attitudes of secondary school students in Oyo Town. The results are based on the mean scores and standard deviations of responses, with a benchmark score of 2.50 indicating positive attitudes. This suggests that many students recognize the practical and global significance of English, which is consistent with the findings of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2020), who found that motivation and self-efficacy are critical factors in language learning success. Furthermore, students' engagement in practicing English outside of the classroom demonstrates an intrinsic interest, albeit limited to specific contexts. These findings highlight the importance of capitalizing on students' appreciation for the utility of English by incorporating practical, career-oriented applications into the curriculum to keep them interested and motivated.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to examine the impact of different learning styles on students' English language proficiency. The results indicate that there was no significant difference in English proficiency scores among students with different learning styles. Hence, the learning styles do not significantly affect students' proficiency in English language acquisition. The result aligns with the work of Desforges and Abouchaar (2018), who argued that while learning styles provide insights into students' preferences, they are not direct predictors of academic performance. This implies that factors beyond individual learning styles, such as instructional methods, teacher effectiveness, and students' motivation, may play a more critical role in language acquisition. Furthermore, the findings support Timmons et al. (2020), who found that instructional designs that focus on content delivery and alignment with learning objectives have a greater impact than those that rely solely on learning style preferences. As a result, this finding encourages educators to use a variety of

teaching strategies that fully engage students, regardless of their preferred learning style, in order to improve language learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationships between home environment, language attitudes, learning styles, and parental involvement in predicting the proficiency of secondary school students in English language learning in Oyo Town, Nigeria. The results showed that learning styles did not significantly predict English competency, indicating that captivating instructional designs and successful teaching methods may have a greater influence than adjusting lessons to suit individual learning preferences. Nonetheless, there was a slight but noteworthy positive correlation between kids' English language proficiency and parental involvement, highlighting the importance of active parental involvement in fostering language acquisition. The availability of English language learning tools and socioeconomic position also showed modest but statistically significant impacts, underscoring the complexity of language acquisition. These results highlight the necessity of a thorough strategy for raising English language competency, combining good teaching methods, nurturing family situations, and enriching educational opportunities to improve academic results.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Head of schools should organize workshops and seminars to educate parents on the importance of their active involvement in supporting their children's language learning, particularly in English.
2. Teachers should adopt innovative and engaging teaching methods that cater to diverse learning preferences, such as incorporating multimedia tools, interactive language games, and role-playing activities to make English lessons more interesting and effective.
3. Schools authority should ensure the availability of adequate English language learning resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual materials, and digital tools, to create an enriched language learning environment.
4. Head of schools should organize extracurricular programs, such as English language clubs, debates, and cultural exchange activities, to provide students with practical opportunities to use and improve their English language skills.

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