

The influence of social factors on students' performance in learning English as a second language in Abia State of Nigeria

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Abstract

Social factors may have an influence on students' performance in learning English as a second language. This study set out to examine the extent to which the levels of education of parents influence the students' performance in English, the influence of rural or urban location, and the extent to which the occupation of parents influences the students' learning of English as an L₂. The theory employed for the research is Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory of cognitive development. A total of six secondary schools, selected from the three Senatorial Districts in Abia State were used for the study. Data were elicited from 268 respondents, using the biographical data the students filled and their examination scores for the first and the second terms, 2023. The data were analysed quantitatively. The results indicate that respondents whose parents were School Certificate holders and below failed English more than respondents whose parents were university/HND holders or OND/NCE holders. However, respondents whose parents were OND/NCE holders performed slightly better than respondents whose parents were degree holders. Also, the result showed that respondents who live in urban or semi-urban areas performed better than those who live in rural areas and finally, participants whose parents were civil servants or graduates who owned businesses performed better than respondents whose parents were not so educated and were in business. The study recommends an improvement of facilities in schools located in the rural settings, among others. This will enhance the academic performance of the students in English.

Key words: Social factors, Students, Performance, L₂ English, Environment.

Introduction

English is a global Language, learnt either as a foreign language (EFL) or a second language (ESL) in different countries. In Nigeria, English is learnt as a second language, and it is also the official language. It is taught in schools as a subject and it is also the language of instruction at all levels, apart from when indigenous languages are taught. The learning of a second language can be complex. In other words, many factors come into play. While some of these factors are personal, others are social. There are individual differences in learning a second language as well as external factors. Researchers have broadly classified such factors

as internal and external (Sun 2019, Minasia 2020) or psychological and social factors (He & Li 2023). The internal or psychological factors are the individual traits such as age, motivation, attitude, personality and first language proficiency (Sun 2019), while the external or social factors are those factors that reflect the language situation.

Ellis (1994) made a distinction between social factors that influence second language learning and social context. According to him, social context refers to the different settings in which L2 (second Language) can take place. He stated further that social context could be either natural settings where informal learning occurs or educational settings, within the four walls of a classroom, where formal learning takes place. Ellis gave examples of such social factors as age, sex, social class and ethnic identity. Gary (2008), summarizing Ellis' distinction of social context and social factors stated that language learning takes place in a social context which consists of many influential social factors.

Some Linguists have also distinguished between language learning and language acquisition (Hussain 2017, Sun 2019, Igiri et al 2020). Igiri *et al* noted that language acquisition has to do with children acquiring language, particularly their native language, through a subconscious process during which they are not aware of grammatical rules while language learning is a conscious learning process usually obtained in a fixed setting, mainly in school settings (Sun 2019). Language acquisition is differentiated from language learning because the processes involved in acquiring/ learning the two are not the same. While language acquisition refers to children acquiring their first language or mother tongue, language learning refers to second language learning by children or adults. The second language is learned after the first language has been acquired. For one thing, the native language is not necessarily taught while the second language may involve some conscious efforts in learning it. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) reiterated that to be proficient in a second language requires intense study and memorisation. The expression “second language learning” is used in this work to differentiate it from language acquisition. This study examines the influence of parents' level of education on Senior Secondary 2 (SS2) students' study of English as a second language in Abia State and also investigates if living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban area influence their learning of English. It further examines if the occupation of respondents' parents influences students' learning of English in Abia State.

The study area is Abia State in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The capital city is Umuahia and the main commercial city is Aba. The State was carved out of Imo State on 27th August 1991 by the Military Administrator, then, General Ibrahim Babangida, The name “Abia” is an acronym from the initial letters of four groups of people namely Aba, Bende, Isuikwuato and Afikpo. Later, Afikpo was removed from Abia State and made part of Ebonyi State. These were the major groups in the state at its creation (Nigerian Gallery, 2017). The slogan for the state is God's Own State, having found the name “Abia” in the Bible. The indigenes of Abia State speak Igbo language. English is spoken as a second and official language in the state. Hence, English is used for business and official purposes. The secondary schools used for the study are Federal Government Girls' College, Umuahia,

Foundation International School, Isiala Ngwa, Living Word, Aba, Adventist Technical High School, Aba, Federal Government College, Ohafia and Holy Cross High School, Uturu. The schools were selected to cover the three Senatorial Districts in Abia State which are Abia Central, Abia South and Abia North. While some of the schools are located in rural areas others are located in the metropolis or semi-urban areas.

The rural areas in this study are places with low population which are usually spread out. The inhabitants are mostly farmers, hence most of the times a lot of farms and sometimes forests are seen in the villages. They do not have facilities like those in the urban areas. For the urban areas, they are cities, with dense population and many networks of good roads. There are streetlights, good educational and health facilities, many businesses, banks, state secretariat which consist of different government establishments in the urban areas. The semi-urban areas in this study are areas that have both urban and rural outlook, they are buildings surrounding the cities. They were previously rural areas, but development is gradually extending to those areas. They have facilities like the urban areas. The schools make up the study area.

Some scholars have examined the influence of social factors on second language learning (Farianti 2018, Edwards et al 2020). Farianti investigated the influence of social factors on students' achievement in learning English while Edwards *et al.* examined social factors and the teaching of pronunciation. This has to do with how learners acquire and use a second language sound system. Areas that have not been investigated are the influence of the level of education of parents of respondents learning English as a second language in Abia State. It has also not been investigated whether residing and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban areas influence students' learning of English as well. This study therefore fills this gap.

The research objectives are to:

- i. investigate the extent to which the level of education of parents influences SS2 students' learning of English as a second language in Abia State;
- ii. examine if residing and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban areas influences SS2 students' learning of English as an L2 in Abia State; and
- iii. Investigate if the occupation of respondents' parents influences students' learning of English in Abia state.

The following research questions will guide the study.

- i. To what extent does the level of education of parents influence SS2 students' learning of English as a second language in Abia State?
- ii. Does residing and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban areas influence SS2 students' learning of English as a second language in Abia State? and
- iii. To what extent does the occupation of respondents' parents influence the students' learning of English in Abia State?

The respondents are in their teens and from the same ethnic group. Hence, they can work as a team in tackling their challenges in learning English. The study will throw light on the role education of parents play in their children's learning of a second language. It will further unveil the influence living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban area has on the students' study of English. The work will be reference material for the students and teachers at all levels.

Review of related literature

Farianti (2018) investigated the impact of social factors such as parents' economic level, parents' occupation, parents' education level and the environment on students' achievement in learning English as a foreign language. A total of 10 students and their parents in Negeri Pembina Aceh Tamiang were used in conducting the research. In collecting data, the students were given a test containing 20 questions while their parents were given a questionnaire with 18 items. The aim of the questionnaire was to elicit information on the parents' social factors. The data were analysed using SPSS 17.0 for descriptive correlation, ANOVA and predictive analysis. From the findings of the research, it was discovered that there is no significant correlation between social factors of parents and students' achievement in learning English. Probably, their scores were influenced by other factors such as the personality of the students and the students' disabilities. A major limitation of this work is the number of students used (10). Using more respondents might have given a more comprehensive result. Again, it is not clear how the ten respondents (students) were selected from many students.

Hou (2015) did a study on how social factors could affect children's foreign language learning among Taiwanese elementary school students. A total of 520 (271 males and 249 females) Taiwanese English as foreign language students, drawn from six different elementary schools, participated in the study. The respondents were divided into two groups -urban and rural- based on their school location. The respondents were made to fill a questionnaire that dealt with their backgrounds, their motivation and attitudes in learning English, following Gardner (1985). It was hoped that the study would provide information on how social factors such as gender, age and social class influence children's second/ foreign language learning motivation and attitude.

The data elicited were analysed using SPSS 17.0, ANOVA and predictive analyses. The result showed that there was no significant difference between students' instrumental and integrative orientation, but it was found that students of urban areas were more integratively oriented ($M= 3.29$) than students of rural areas ($M= 3.07$). The result further showed that as for families guiding the students on their English homework, 7.9% of the students in the urban areas expressed "never". The findings might be because English is studied as a foreign language in Taiwan. This can be compared to the study of French or German in Nigeria. Many parents are not likely to be conversant with a foreign language, hence unable to guide their children in homework in such language. A major limitation of the study is that the

respondents were from six elementary schools in Tainan, a southern city in Taiwan. The result might have been different if other parts of the island were involved. Again, some of the respondents might not be serious in answering the questions asked since they might not be part of their academic transcripts.

Some scholars have investigated the impact of social factors on the learning of English. Many of them worked on the study of English as a foreign language while this work is on the study of English as a second language. In examining English as a second language, the respondents have more exposure to learning and speaking the language than when it is taught as a foreign language. Moreover, some of the studies reviewed were on elementary school students or tertiary students but this work is on secondary school students. The research further examines the influence of the level of education of parents of respondents on the students' learning of English as a second language, the effect living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban areas has on the study of English and also the extent to which occupation of parents influence the students' learning of English.

Theoretical framework

The theory applied in this research is the Sociocultural theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1934, 1978). Most of his works were published after his death. The theory is about cognitive development being influenced by cultural and social factors. Lev Vygotsky, in his theory, believed that teachers, parents and peers make an impact on an individual's learning as well as culture and beliefs. This is achieved through collaborative discussion with more knowledgeable members of society.

According to Vygotsky, the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is someone who has a higher level of ability or greater understanding than the learner regarding a particular task, process or concept. The MKO can be a teacher, parent or even a peer who provides guidance to enable a child to learn skills within his/her zone of proximal development. That is, the gap between what a child can do himself and what he can achieve with guidance. The theory recognises that having someone to guide a child in a task helps the child to learn to do the task by himself/herself.

This research employs Sociocultural theory to show that parents, who are knowledgeable, provide guidance for their children in their academics. In this way, they are able to influence their academics positively.

Research methodology

A total of six schools, selected from the three Senatorial Districts (Abia North, Aba South and Abia Central) in Abia State were used for the research. Exactly 268 SS2 respondents were randomly selected from the six sampled schools. The criteria were that two schools were selected from each Senatorial District in Abia State, and they were located either in rural, semi-urban or urban settings.

In each school, 50 copies of questionnaires were given to SS2 students to fill out their biographical data. Such data included the highest level of education of parents, occupation of parents and residence, whether rural, urban or semi-urban. The students also indicated their scores for the first and the second term examinations in 2023. The information was to determine the influence of social factors on the students' performance in English. They were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires. It is hoped that being anonymous will enable the students to fill their responses honestly. The distribution of the questionnaires was done with the permission of the various Principals in the sampled schools. The respondents were told that participation was not compulsory.

The research questionnaires were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research design was a descriptive survey. The descriptive statistical analysis involved frequency counts and simple percentages. This was done to show the students' responses to the biographical questions asked. The statistical data were put in tables.

Data Presentation, Results and Discussion of Findings.

The results of the analysis were presented in tables 1-5 according to the research objectives. Table 1 provides data on the extent to which the level of education of parents influences SS2 students' learning of English as an L₂. Table 2 is a continuation of Table 1. Table 3 presents data on the effect schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban area has on students' learning of English as an L₂, while Table 4 presents data on the effect of occupation of parents' respondents on the students' study of English. Table 5 is a continuation of Table 4.

The students indicated their scores in their termly examination and the scoring were done within the following range -70 and above (A), 60- 69 (B), 50- 59 (C), 40- 49 (D) and 30 - 39 (F). The frequencies were put in percentages. The percentages were calculated based on the number in a particular subsection. For instance, the number of parents who are civil servants is 223. To get the percentage of respondents who scored A, whose parents are civil servants $\frac{56}{223} \times \frac{100}{1} = 25.11\%$

There were varied occupations of parents indicated by the respondents. For convenience's sake, all those that work for government are grouped under civil servants.

Those that own businesses are grouped into two – educated business owners and non-educated business owners. The educated parents in this study are those that have tertiary education and the non-educated parents are school certificate holders and below. The corporate workers are those that work in the banking sector because banks are not owned by governments. Clergymen and politicians are grouped separately. Finally, Abia State is divided into rural, urban and semi-urban areas for ease in analysis. The tables are presented below.

Table 1- The extent to which level of education of parents’ respondents influence the students’ learning of English.

UNIV/HND				OND/NCE					
1 st Term				2 nd Term		1 st Term		2 nd Term	
S/N	Score range	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	70+	43	24.43	47	25.82	6	26.08	7	29.16
2.	60-69	57	32.38	73	40.10	9	39.13	8	33.33
3.	50-59	65	36.93	35	19.23	6	26.08	5	20.83
4	40-49	8	4.54	23	12.63	-	8.69	4	16.66
5	30-39	3	1.70	4	2.19	2	8.69		
Total		176		182		23		24	

Table 1 indicates the performance of respondents whose parents are either university/HND or OND/NCE holders.

Table 2- Secondary to no formal education

S/N	1st term			2 nd Term		
	Score range	Freq	%	Score range	Freq	%
1	70+	4	7.84	70+	9	20
2	60-69	15	29.41	60-69	16	35.55
3	50-59	22	43.13	50-59	11	24.44
4	40-49	2	3.92	40-49	9	20
5	30-39	8	15.68	30-39	6	13.33
Total		51		45		

Table 2 shows the performance in English of respondents whose parents hold from school certificate to no formal education.

Table 3- Extent to which living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban area influences students' learning of English as a second language.

Score range	1 st Term						2 nd Term						
	Rural		Urban		Semi-Urban		Rural		Urban		Semi-urban		
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
70+	6	8.6	26	19.84	6	12.5	70+	13	20.63	36	23.37	12	23.07
60-69	22	31.8	42	32.06	17	35.41	60-69	22	34.92	57	37.01	19	36.53
50-59	25	36.23	47	35.87	19	39.58	50-59	12	19.04	32	20.77	7	13.46
40-49	5	7.24	15	9.92	-	-	40-49	8	12.69	25	16.23	10	19.23
30-39	11	15.94	3	2.29	6	12.5	30-39	8	12.69	4	2.59	4	7.69
Total	69		131		48		63		154		52		

Table 3 indicates the performance in English of respondents who reside and school in rural, metropolis or semi-urban domains.

Table 4: Extent to which occupation of parents' respondents influence students' learning of English I

1 st Term												
Score range	Civil ServiceFreq	%	Business(UNIV/HND/OND)	%	Business(SSCE and below)Freq	%	Corporate workerFreq	%	ClergyFreq	%	PoliticianFreq	%
70+	56	25.11	23	17.03	16	11.42	3	60	2	100	2	28.57
60-69	63	28.25	47	34.81	43	30.71	2	40	-	-	-	-
50-59	77	34.52	51	37.77	54	38.57	-	-	-	-	5	71.42
40-49	16	7.17	9	6.66	6	4.28	-	-	-	-	-	-
30-39	11	4.93	5	3.70	21	15	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	223		135		140		5		2		7	

Table 5: Extent to which occupation of parents' respondents influence students' learning of English II

2 nd Term												
Score range	Civil ServiceFreq	%	Business (Univ/HND/OND)Freq	%	Business (SSCE and below)Freq	%	Corporate workerFreq	%	ClergyFreq	%	PoliticianFreq	%
70+	45	38.07	34	26.77	24	20	1	14.28	4	50	2	33.33
60-69	78	39.59	49	38.58	40	33.33	3	42.85	3	37.5	4	66.66
50-59	36	18.27	26	20.47	27	22.5	2	28.57	1	12.5	-	-
40-49	35	17.76	10	7.87	22	18.33	1	14.28	-	-	-	-
30-39	3	1.52	8	6.29	7	5.83		-	-	-	-	-
Total	197		127		120		7		8		6	

Results

This study was on the influence of social factors on students' performance in learning English as a second language. The social factors investigated were parents of respondents' level of education, their parents' occupation and if living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban environment had any influence on the academic performance of the students.

In Table 1 which sought to investigate the extent to which the levels of education of respondents' parents influence SS2 students' learning of English as an L2, 24.43% (n-43) and 25.8% (n-47) of respondents whose parents are degree holders scored A in the first and the second term examinations. Also, 26.08% and 29.16% of respondents whose parents are OND/NCE holders scored A in the first and the second term examinations, respectively, thus, performing slightly better than respondents whose parents are degree holders. The failure rate is low for both respondents whose parents are degree/HND holders (1.70% first term 2.19%, second term) and OND/NCE holders (8.69% first term and no failure in second term).

When this result was compared with respondents whose parents are from school certificate holders to no formal education, 7.84% and 20% scored A in the first and the second term examinations, respectively, while 15.68% and 13.33% failed in the first and the second term examinations. The failure rate is higher with respondents whose parents hold from school certificate to no formal education. The result showed that the educational levels of parents play a major role in children's performance. This is because parents who are educated will make out time to either teach their children or employ home teachers to do that while parents who are not learned will most times take their children to their shops where the children help in their businesses or play, if they are younger children, till when they come back home late in the evening. For the few respondents whose parents were not so learned, and they made A, the explanation could be that apart from parental levels of education enhancing a child's performance in school, there could be other factors such as the child's habits, abilities and motivation.

Table 3 explored the effect living and schooling in rural, urban or semi-urban environment has on the students' learning of English. From the data, respondents who live in rural areas and scored A, in the first term were 8.6% (n-6), urban 19.84% (n-26), semi-urban 12.5% (n-6). Note that the percentage is done according to the number of respondents who live in the different domains, respectively. For respondents who had an F: rural, 15.94% (n-11), urban 2.29% (n-3), semi-urban 12.5% (n-6).

For the second term examination, the percentages of those who scored A were: rural 20.63%, urban 23.37%, semi-urban 23.07%. For those who failed: rural 12.69%, urban 2.59% and semi urban 7.69%. The result showed that rural dwellers failed more than those living in urban or semi-urban areas. This indicates that geographical location affects academic performance in English. This might be because the respondents living in rural areas may not have facilities either at home or in school like those living in town or semi urban domains although they might be taught by teachers who are as qualified as those teaching in

the metropolis. On the other hand, some of their teachers, particularly in private schools, may not be qualified because the school fees are low and the proprietors might be compelled to employ teachers they can afford to pay. This eventually affects the students' learning of English.

With regard to the extent to which occupation of parents' respondents influence the students learning of English, 25.11% (n-56) of respondents whose parents are civil servants scored A in the first term while 22.8% (n-45) of the same set of students scored A in the second term. For respondents whose parents are university graduates and its equivalent and own private businesses, 17.03% (n-23) scored A in the first term in English while 26.77% (n-34) of the same students scored A in the second term in English. On the other hand, respondents whose parents are not so learned, but they own their businesses, 11.42% (n-16) scored A in English first term while in the second term, 20% (n-24) scored A in English. For those who failed in the first term, respondents whose parents are Civil Servants were 4.93% (n-11), those whose parents are graduates who owned their businesses 3.70% (n-5), those who owned their businesses but are school certificate holders and below 15% (n-21), those who are corporate workers, clergymen and politicians, none of the children had an F. Then, for the second term examination, those whose parents were Civil Servants 1.52% (n-3), respondents whose parents were graduates and owned their businesses 6.29% (n-8), respondents whose parents were business owners but hold from School Certificate to no formal education 5.83% (n-7), respondents whose parents were corporate workers, clergy, politicians, respectively, none of their children scored F. From this result, one can observe that respondents whose parents were not educated and were in business failed most, particularly in the first term examination. Their children join them in their business centres after school instead of going home to rest and read later. This might be the reason why they have the highest level of failures in first term examination. On the other hand, respondents whose parents are Civil Servants or graduates in business may have made more investment in terms of purchase of language books, employing home teachers than parents who are not educated.

Discussion of findings

This study contrasts with Farianti2018 to an extent. Farianti's finding was that there was no significant correlation between social factors of parents and students' achievement in learning English. According to the author, their scores were influenced by other factors such as the personality of the students and their disabilities. Conversely, this present research discovered that the rate of failure in English of respondents whose parents were not so educated is more (15.68%, first term and 13.33%, 2nd term) compared with respondents whose parents are university graduates (1.70%, first term and 2.19%, second term) and for respondents whose parents were OND/NCE holders, the failure rate was 8.69% first term and no failure in second term. However, there were some respondents whose parents were not

educated who made A (7.84% First term, 20% Second term) and B (29.41% 1st term and 35.55% 2nd term). On the other hand, there were other respondents whose parents were either university graduates (4.54% first term, 2.63% 2nd term), OND/NCE (8.69% 1st term, 16.66% second term) who scored D. In this regard, the result of this study agrees with Farianti that the scores were influenced by the personality of the students.

Conclusion

The study was on the influence of social factors on students' performance in learning English as a second language. The social factors investigated were parents' level of education, parents' occupation and geographical location of respondents and how these factors might affect the academic performance of the respondents in their study of English as an L2.

The research tools used for the study were biographical data the respondents filled in and also their scores in the first and the second term examinations in the 2023 academic session. The finding showed that the levels of education of parents' respondents play a major role in the students' performance in English. Respondents whose parents were NCE holders scored slightly higher (26.08% and 29.16% respectively) (Table 1) than respondents whose parents were degree holders (24.43% and 25.89%). However, there were respondents whose parents were not educated who scored A while there were others whose parents were university graduates or OND/HND holders who failed. The implication is that personality and motivation are equally important in language study. The research further discovered that respondents who live and school in urban areas performed better than those who live in the rural or semi-rural areas. Finally, the study discovered that respondents whose parents were Civil Servants or graduates who were self-employed performed better than respondents whose parents owned their businesses but were holders of school certificate or no formal education.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to improve the facilities in schools located in the rural settings. This will enhance the academic performance of the students in English and generally.
2. Parents who are not so learned and own businesses should realise that when their children come back from school they need to rest, do their homework and also read ahead for their classes the next day. This will improve their performance in school than keeping them in their business centres till late.

Further Studies

More studies can be done on the factors that cause students' failure in English even when their parents are educated and they reside in urban areas, where apparently, there are more facilities.

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