

THE PLACE OF AGE IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE BY BILINGUAL JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN IBARAPA LAND, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

Okedigba, Segun Ogunniyi, *Ph.D*

Department of English,
The College of Education,
P.M.B. 001, Lanlate,
Oyo State, Nigeria.
Tel.: +2347066471616
E-mail: okedigbasegun@yahoo.com

Abstract

Ordinarily, children who do not have learning difficulties succeed in acquiring their first language with relative ease. On the other hand, however, it is not all children that are successful in learning a second language. Scholars have adduced a number of factors as being responsible for this, and age is one of such factors. Therefore, this work studied age as a variable with careful observation of the respondents to see whether their abilities in English language were influenced by their ages. The study adopted Lenneberg's Critical Period hypothesis as its theoretical framework. The descriptive survey design was used. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select six public secondary schools in Ibarapa, Oyo State, Nigeria. Second Language Proficiency Tests (SLPTs) and Participant observation were the instruments used. Data were subjected to descriptive and t-test statistical analyses at 0.05 level of significance. Age had no significant effects on the overall proficiency of pre-adolescent ($\bar{x} = 62.76$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 63.77$) respondents in English; ($t = -0.355$). Findings from the observation, however, showed that collaboration among the variables of second language learning was needed for effective second language learning. It concluded that age alone cannot significantly affect the learning of English, and any other language for that matter, as a second language. It recommended, among others, that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, school authorities, curriculum developers, and language policy planners should note that attaining proficiency in a second language is a product of a number of variables working together in complementarity.

Keywords: Age, complementarity, critical period hypothesis, second language proficiency tests, observation.

Introduction

There is no-gainsaying that Nigeria is multi-lingual and multi-cultural. The country is blessed with hundreds of languages that are indigenous to her. Lewis, Gary, and Charles (2013) put the number of languages in Nigeria at over 529. Of this figure, 522 are said to be indigenous, and 9 foreign. The foreign languages include Arabic, French, German and Russian. Arabic and French enjoy some degrees of usage in parts of the country and domains. Arabic is used in Islamic prayers and religious service while French is spoken in border areas like Badagry, Lagos State and Ilera, Ogun State. Arabic, French, German and Russian are also being taught and learnt in a number of tertiary institutions in the country. However, English which was once seen as a foreign language has long become the second language of most Nigerians. It is also Nigeria's official language. It has also become the first language of some Nigerian children, especially those whose parents speak different mother tongues.

Although Nigeria is multilingual, the nation is, however, in reality, bilingual since most Nigerians, most especially educated ones, speak two languages only; speaking their various mother tongues and English language. This confirms Adegbite's (2003) submission that "Sometimes a multilingual person or society may be said to be bilingual in a technical sense if the numerous languages in the repertoire of such an individual or society... perform social roles as mother tongue and second language" (p. 153).

Apart from being taught as a subject, English language is the medium of instruction in Nigerian educational institutions starting from the later part of primary school up to the tertiary institutions. Proficiency in the language is almost tantamount to good performance in the other school subjects since the contents of these subjects, apart from the indigenous languages, are written in English language. Students' knowledge in these subjects is also tested in English.

The time of exposure of Nigerian bilingual children to English language varies from child to child, and even from place to place. By time here, it means the age the child first gets introduced to the language, and the frequency of using the language. Most Nigerian children start learning English language formally in school after they must have relatively mastered their mother tongues. But there are some that are introduced to English language at home informally by their parents.

Ogunsiji, Fakeye & Olagbaju (2017) are of the opinion that language is acquired basically through cognitive processing. According to them, despite the fact that cognitive processing is a common feature in both first and second language learning and acquisition, different theories have described the process of language acquisition in different ways. The diversity notwithstanding, they are of the opinion that two arguments; *nature* and *nurture*, are central to second language acquisition process. Nature based arguments believe that the ability to acquire language is innate while nurture based arguments view language acquisition process as deliberate and learnable (p.118).

Statement of the Problem

While children who do not have learning difficulties succeed in acquiring their first language with relative ease, it is not all children that are successful in learning a second language. Scholars have adduced a number of factors as being responsible for this, and age is one of such factors. Proponents of the Critical Period Hypothesis are of the opinion that there is a ceiling to the age that a child can successfully learn a second language, and that once that period is over, learning a language effectively becomes difficult. Most of their works have, however, studied age as an isolated variable without taking into consideration other likely factors that could come into play in second language (L_2) learning. So, this work studied age as a variable with careful observation of the respondents to see whether age would actually have impact on their abilities in English language.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study. The data generated will be used to test the hypotheses later on in the study.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English listening skill.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English speaking skill.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English reading skill.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English writing skill.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference between the overall proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English.

Note: These hypotheses were motivated by some scholarly claims that children appear to learn language faster than adults.

Theoretical Framework

The Critical Period Hypothesis is the theoretical guide for this study. The hypothesis was first proposed for language acquisition by Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts in 1959 in their paper entitled *Speech and Brain Mechanisms*. The hypothesis was, however, popularised by Eric Lenneberg in 1967 with his work, *Biological Foundations of Language*. Lenneberg in his theory states that language acquisition has to do with maturation as he proposes that the human brain is designed to acquire language at a certain time. He then suggests a *cut-off age* of around *12 or 13 years*. He concludes that once this period is over, language learning *slowed down* or, in effect, was *no longer possible*. The theory has, however, been extended to second language acquisition because language learning ability tends to decline with age. Older learners of a second language scarcely achieve the native-like fluency that younger learners do have, even though older learners appear to be

progressing faster than children in the initial stages. This hypothesis was chosen because of its relevance to linguistic milestones.

Literature Review

Age is about the most frequently considered in the discussions of individual differences in L₂ acquisition. This is arguably because it can be measured and described precisely and reliably. Guided by the postulations of the Critical Period Hypothesis, scholars have studied the effects of age on language learning. Here, we look briefly into the effects of age on second language learning by way of some of the studies already carried out on the subject. Harley (1986) studied the effects of age on the learning of grammar in second language acquisition (SLA). She concludes that the learning of grammar is highly constrained by age. She compared attainment of French learners in early and late immersion programmes. She reported that after 1000 exposure hours, late learners had better control of French verb systems and syntax.

Scherag, Demuth, Rösler, Neville; and Röder (2004) hinted that the learning of some syntactic processing functions and lexical access may be limited by maturation but age does not relatively affect semantic functions. This was part of what they found in their study of the effect of late second language acquisition on speech comprehension by German immigrants to the U.S.A. and American immigrants to Germany.

Even though Chomsky's Universal Grammar does not describe an optimal age for second language acquisition, it implies that younger children can learn languages more easily than older learners since adults would have to reactivate those innate principles that helped them build what Chomsky (1993) calls 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD), a device which helped them during L₁ learning, for them to learn a second language. However, children on their own part can learn several languages simultaneously as long as these principles are still active and they are exposed to sufficient language samples (Pinker, 1995).

Singleton and Newport's (2004) findings corroborate the claim above. Simon, a child that learned the American Sign Language (ASL) as his L₁ from parents who had learned it as an L₂ after puberty was the subject of their study. Simon's parents were imperfect models. Results of the study showed that Simon learned normal and logical rules and was able to construct an organised linguistic system, in spite of the fact that the input he was exposed to was inconsistent and imperfect. Their conclusion was that the inability of Simon's parents to attain complete fluency in ASL was due to the fact that they learned ASL after puberty.

A number of studies have also been carried out to determine the applicability of the hypothesis to second language (L₂) learning or acquisition. Some of them are examined here. Harley (1986) studied the effects of age on the learning of grammar in second language acquisition (SLA). Harley's conclusion was that the learning of grammar is highly constrained by age. She compared attainment of French learners in early and late immersion programmes. She reported that after 1000 exposure hours, late learners had better control of French verb systems and syntax. However, when she compared early immersion students

(with an average age of 6.9 years) with native speakers of the same age, she identified that both had common problem areas, including third person plurals and polite 'vous' forms. This, according to her, then suggests that grammar (in L₁ or L₂) is generally acquired later, possibly because it requires abstract cognition and reasoning.

Flege, Mackay and Piske (2002) studied the effect which the age at which Italian-English bilinguals started learning English had on their abilities in both languages. They discovered that the early bilinguals were English (L₂) dominant and the late bilinguals Italian (L₁) dominant. They also discovered that dominant Italian bilinguals had foreign accents that reflected in their spoken English, but early bilinguals (English dominant) had no accents in either language.

Sebastián-Gallés, Echeverría; and Bosch (2005) on their own part studied bilinguals in order to highlight the importance of early language exposure to bilinguals. They did a comparative study of vocabulary processing and representation in Spanish-Catalan bilinguals who were exposed to both languages simultaneously from birth and those who had learned L₂ later and were either Spanish or Catalan dominant. Their findings showed that 'from birth bilinguals', that is, simultaneous bilinguals, had significantly more difficulty distinguishing Catalan words from non-Catalan words differing in specific vowels than Catalan-dominants, that is, sequential bilinguals, did. The yardstick used was the time it took the two types of bilinguals to make the distinction.

Some positions of the proponents of the Critical Period Hypothesis have, however, generated disagreements among scholars. For instance, Singleton and Lengyel (1995) believed that there is no critical period for learning vocabulary in a second language. Similarly, Robertson (2002) observed that factors other than age (such as personal motivation, anxiety, input and output skills, settings and time commitment) may even be more significant in successful second language (L₂) learning. Others like Ramscar & Gitcho (2007) and Thompson-Schill, Ramscar & Chrysikou (2009) were of the opinion that if a critical period does exist, it may be due, at least partially, to the delay in the development of the prefrontal cortex in children.

Vanhove (2013) presented some of the criticisms of Critical Period Hypothesis as made by some scholars. First, while citing Singleton (2005), Vanhove said scholars do not agree on a putative critical period for language acquisition. For instance, while Lenneberg's (1967) critical period stretches from two years of age to puberty (which he puts at about 14 years of age), other scholars have drawn different cut-off points which range from 12, 15, 16 or even 18 years of age (cf. Muñoz & Singleton, 2011).

Secondly, the setting that is relevant to the Critical Period Hypothesis has not been explicitly stated; that is, it is not stated whether the critical period considers implicit learning processes only, i.e. only the untutored language acquisition in immersion contexts or whether it also applies to (at least partly) instructed learning. According to DeKeyser (2000) in Vanhove (2013), while most researchers agree on the former, some others have included

subjects who have had at least some instruction in the L₂ in their studies.

Another criticism of the Critical Period Hypothesis is that there is lack of consensus among scholars on what the scope of the critical period (CP) is; that is, the areas of language that are concerned or affected. Consequently, some researchers are of the opinion that a CP is most likely to constrain the acquisition of pronunciation and grammar and have, therefore, focussed mainly on these areas in their studies on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Birdsong, 2006). Some researchers have also tried to define distinguishable CPs for the different language areas of phonetics, morphology and syntax, and even for lexis (Long, 2007).

The fourth and the last criticism of the CPH that is considered here was that made by Vanhove (2013) himself. He stated that the CPH has focused on 'ultimate attainment' (UA) or the 'final' state of L₂ proficiency instead of the rate of learning. He stated that the findings by researches into the rate of acquisition conducted by Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), and Krashen, Long & Scarcella (1979) had clearly shown that the CPH cannot hold for the rate variable. Some other studies by Genesee (1978) and Swain & Lapkin (1989) have reported that though young children acquire pronunciation easily, they are not particularly efficient learners of vocabulary or other aspects of language structure.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted in this study. The work made use of purposive sampling technique in selecting the schools and the respondents for this study.

Scope and Delimitation

The study area is made up of seven major towns and other numerous lesser communities. Administratively, Ibarapa land is divided into three (3) local government areas. Using purposive sampling technique, two (2) secondary schools were selected from each of the local governments giving us six (6) secondary schools used for the study. The schools were selected because they are public and co-educational. They are also relatively old schools with over thirty (30) years of existence. The schools are:

- (1). Lanlate High School, Lanlate
- (2). Obaseku High School, Eruwa
- (3). Igboora High School, Igboora
- (4). Ayelogun Grammar School, Idere
- (5). Community High School, Tapa
- (6). Igangan High School, Iganagan

Population and Population Sample

The population of the study comprised all junior secondary school students in Ibarapa land from which fifteen(15) were purposively sampled from each of the six schools making a total of ninety (90). The respondents were all Yoruba-English bilinguals in Junior Secondary III; that is, third year of secondary school. The respondents were chosen from this class because it is a class where pupils are around the age of 12 years or more. This is the period

the “critical period” is believed to set in. Though the sample might appear small, the meticulousness and rigour that went into the selection process makes this sample to be representative enough of the other bilingual junior secondary school children in the study area that were not directly studied.

Research Instruments

The instruments employed in the generation of data for this study were Second Language Proficiency Tests (SLPTs) and participant observation. The tests assessed the abilities of the respondents in the four skills of English language. Each test carried 25 marks thereby giving us a total of 100 marks for all the tests. Any respondent who scored less than 12 marks in the test on a skill was taken to have failed, and would, therefore, be seen as being less proficient in that skill of English language. Observation was employed to facilitate interaction with the respondents in order to determine what other factor(s) might affect their proficiency in their second language apart from the variable of age which was studied directly.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data generated via the language skills/proficiency tests are analysed using the **t-test** statistical method. The t-test is used because the respondents are in polar groups: Pre-adolescent (below age 13) versus adolescent (age 13-20). Participant observation was employed to facilitate interaction with the respondents in order to determine what other social-psychological variable(s) might affect their proficiency in their second language apart from the variable of age.

Table 1: Analysis of the Performances of the Respondents in the Skills Based on Age

Skills	Listening (Ho1)		Speaking (Ho2)		Reading (Ho3)		Writing (Ho4)		Over-all Proficiency(Ho5)	
	Adolescents	Adolescents	Pre-Adolescents	Adolescents	Pre-Adolescents	Adolescents	Adolescents	Adolescents	Pre-Adolescents	Adolescents
Total of Scores	1217	386	1031	348	1018	336	1002	333	4268	1403
Mean	17.9	17.55	15.16	15.82	14.97	15.27	14.74	15.14	62.76	63.77
Upper score	22	22	20	20	20	20	23	21	-	-
Lower score	8	10	8	10	7	10	3	5	-	-
Std. var.	3.15	3.75	3.50	3.70	3.08	3.21	4.59	4.50	11.27	12.56
Co. of var.	0.18	0.21	0.23	0.23	0.21	0.21	0.31	0.30	0.179	0.197
N	68	22	68	22	68	22	68	22	68	22
Mean difference	0.35		-0.66		-0.30		-0.40		-101	
Cal-t	.633		-1.062		-.525		-.493			0.355
Df	67		67		67		67			88
P	.529		.292		.601		.624			0.724

Key:

Ave. = Average *N* = Number of respondents
Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation *P* = Precision value of significance
Co. of var. = Co-efficient of variation
Df = Degree of freedom

H₀₁: *There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English listening skill.*

Table 2: *Proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual respondents in English listening skill*

Skill	Age	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation	Cal-t.	Df	P
Proficiency in English Listening Skill	Pre-adolescence	68	17.90	-0.35	3.15	0.18	.633	67	.529
	Adolescence	22	17.55		3.75	0.21			

The analysis of the data in **H₀₁** in the table above shows that there was no significant mean difference between the proficiency of pre -adolescent ($\bar{x} = 17.90$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 17.55$) respondents in English listening skill ($t = .633$). The mean difference is 0.35. The level of significance is greater than .05; (Sig. = .529): $P > .05$ and the null hypothesis is, therefore, accepted. The highest score of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in the English listening skill test was 22, and their lowest scores were 8 and 10 respectively. The co-efficient of variation of their performance were 0.18 and 0.21 respectively. The data indicate that there was no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in English listening skill going by their mean scores and the co-efficient of variation. The study, therefore, concludes that “there is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English listening skill”.

H₀₂: *There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English speaking skill.*

Table 3: *Proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual respondents in English speaking skill*

Skill	Age	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation	Cal-t.	Df	P
Proficiency in English Speaking Skill	Pre-adolescence	68	15.16	-0.66	3.15	0.18	1.062	67	.292
	Adolescence	22	15.82		3.75	0.21			

The analysis of the data in **H₀₂** in Table 3 above shows that there was no significant mean difference between the proficiency of pre -adolescent ($\bar{x} = 15.16$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 15.82$) respondents in English speaking skill ($t = -1.062$). The mean difference was -0.66. The level of significance is greater than .05; (Sig. = .292): $P > .05$. The null hypothesis is thus

accepted. Both groups of respondents had a highest score of 20 marks. Pre-adolescent respondents and adolescent respondents had 8 and 10 as their lowest scores respectively. The co-efficient of variation score for both age groups was 0.23. The study, therefore, concludes that “there is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English speaking skill”.

H₀₃: *There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English reading skill.*

Table 4: *Proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual respondents in English reading skill*

Skill	Age	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation	Cal-t.	Df	P
Proficiency in English Reading Skill	Pre-adolescence	68	14.97	-0.30	3.15	0.21	-.525	67	.601
	Adolescence	22	15.27		3.75	0.21			

The analysis of the data in **H₀₃** in Table 4 above shows that there was no significant mean difference between the proficiency of pre -adolescent ($\bar{x} = 14.97$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 15.27$) respondents in English reading skill ($t = -.525$). The mean difference was -0.30. The level of significance is greater than .05; (Sig. = .601): $P > .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is upheld. The highest score of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in the English reading test was 20 while the lowest scores were 7 and 10 respectively. The co-efficient of variation for the two age grades was 0.21. The co-efficient of variation thus indicates that the scores of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in the English reading test were both equally close to their mean scores. The null hypothesis is upheld and the study, therefore, concludes that “there is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English reading skill”.

Ho₄: *There is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English writing skill.*

Table 5: *Proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual respondents in English writing skill*

Skill	Age	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation	Cal-t.	Df	P
Proficiency in English Writing Skill	Pre-adolescence	68	14.74	-0.40	4.59	0.31	-.493	67	.624
	Adolescence	22	15.14		4.50	0.30			

From Table 5 above, the analysis of the data in **Ho₄** shows that there was no significant mean difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent ($\bar{x} = 14.74$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 15.14$) respondents in English writing skill ($t = -.493$). The mean difference was -0.40 . The level of significance is greater than $.05$; ($\text{Sig.} = .624$): $P > .05$. The null hypothesis is, therefore, accepted. Pre-adolescent respondents had a highest score of 23 to adolescents' 21 while their lowest scores were 3 and 5 respectively. The co-efficient of variation of their scores were 0.31 and 0.30 respectively. The co-efficient of variation indicate that both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents had nearly the same level of proficiency in English writing skill. Therefore, the study concludes that "there is no significant difference between the proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English writing skill".

Ho₅: *There is no significant difference between the over-all proficiency of pre-adolescent and adolescent bilingual junior secondary school children in English Language.*

Table 6: *Summary of the Analysis of the Over-all Proficiency of Pre-adolescent and Adolescent Respondents in English*

Skill	Age	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation	Cal-t.	Df	P
Over-all Proficiency in English	Pre-adolescence	68	62.76	-1.01	11.27	0.179	-0.355	88	0.724
	Adolescenc	22	63.77		12.56	0.197			

The analysis of the data in Table 6 above shows that there was no significant mean difference between the general or over-all proficiency of pre-adolescent ($\bar{x} = 62.76$) and adolescent ($\bar{x} = 63.77$) respondents in English ($t = -0.355$). The mean difference was -1.01 . The level of

significance is greater than .05; (Sig. = .724): $P > .05$. The standard deviations of the scores of the two age groups were 11.27 and 12.56 respectively. The co-efficient of variation of their scores were 0.179 and 0.197 respectively. Though there was no significant difference in the overall proficiency of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in English, the co-efficient of variation of the performances of the respondents, however, indicate that pre-adolescent respondents scored marks that were closer to their mean score in the four skills of the language while the marks of adolescent respondents were relatively scattered away from their own mean score.

Discussion

From the findings of this study, age appeared not to be necessarily a factor in the attainment of proficiency in English language by the respondents. The fact that both groups of respondents have been interacting with English language regularly; especially in school, among other factors, must have been responsible for the lack of noticeable disparities in the proficiency levels of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in the language. For instance, English language is the medium of instruction in school. Similarly, text-books on virtually all school subjects are written in English language, and students, therefore, have cause to interact with their teachers and textbooks in the language on a regular basis. So, given quality opportunities for language use, age might not be a barrier to effective second language acquisition. This is in tandem with Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis where-in he argues that the conditions for acquisition are especially good when the learner interacts regularly in the second language. Since there were no significant mean differences in the proficiency of both pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in all the skills of English language, it is difficult to agree with the claim that age as a single variable can affect bilingual children's proficiency in their second language. Age will have to collaborate with some other variable(s) for its impact to be felt on second language acquisition or learning.

Findings from Observation

Interactions with the respondents seemed to have provided some answers as to why age had not impacted on the over-all proficiency of both the pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents in English. Two variables; motivation and attitude, were found to have played important roles in the proficiency of the respondents in the English language.

As for motivation, the importance of English language to the educational success of the respondents was found to be a strong motivational factor for all of them to learn the language. For instance, the realisation that their proficiency in English language would help them do well in the other school subjects could have spurred them on to strive to attain proficiency in the language. Similarly, the fact that at least a credit pass in the English language is required for them to be admitted into any tertiary institution in Nigeria after their secondary education motivated the respondents to not only learn the language, but to equally strive to be proficient in it. Thus, the respondents were instrumentally motivated in this regard. Therefore, the quality of motivation received by both the pre-adolescent and adolescent respondents to learn English was a strong factor that was responsible for the non-significance of the differences in their over-all proficiency in the English language. So,

irrespective of the age of a second language learner, he/she may not effectively learn his/her second language if he/she is not properly motivated, and vice-versa.

Their attitude was another psychological variable that influenced the respondents' level of proficiency in the English language. Attitude can be a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, events, activities, and ideas. It could be concrete, abstract or just about anything in one's environment. The attitude of most of the respondents towards English language was found to be positive. Many of the respondents openly showed their love for the subject with some of them even saying that the language/subject was their best (school) subject. With positive dispositions towards the English language, the proficiency of the respondents could not but be enhanced. What is implied by this finding is that irrespective of his/her age, a bilingual's attitude is important for him/her to succeed in learning his/her second language. Therefore, if bilingual learners' attitude towards their second language is positive, they will strive to attain proficiency in their second language irrespective of their age.

Conclusion

From the results of the analyses of the data to test the different null hypotheses formulated for this work, it has been found that age as a variable did not affect the quality of the respondents' language skills and general proficiency in the English language. We are of the opinion that this was so because age as a single variable (and like other variables, too) cannot determine proficiency in a second language; some other variables (of second language acquisition or learning) have to be complementarily present. Therefore, other things being equal, age alone might not affect a bilingual child's linguistic proficiency, especially in the L₂. This conclusion is derived from our conviction that if a child, for instance, no matter how young, is not well motivated; has negative attitude towards the L₂ or is denied the needed rich and robust linguistic environment which guarantees comprehensible in-put, such a child may never learn the L₂ well.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made. First, stake-holders such as parents, teachers, school authorities, curriculum developers, and language policy planners should note that attaining proficiency in a second language is a product of a number of variables working together in complementarity.

Similarly, parents and teachers should note that factors like motivation and attitude are crucial to successful second language learning or acquisition. Both variables could either be buoyed or stifled by parents and teachers of the English language. Regrettably, however, there are many Nigerian teachers of English who do not encourage their students in their quest to learn the English language by their poor teaching methodologies and harsh remarks.

Nigerian English bilingual children should be steadfast in their quest to attain proficiency in the English language bearing in mind the enormity of the benefits which proficiency in the language will avail them academically and socially. The age at which they

start learning the English language cannot be an obstacle to their attainment of proficiency in the language as evidenced by people like the Noble Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and many other prominent African scholars who, in spite of their late exposure to the English language, have been able to carve a niche for themselves in terms of their proficiency in the English language.

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