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# INFLUENCE OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF YORUBA FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the influence of prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language in the academic performance of student in Literature-in-English in Lagos State. In carrying out study, three research questions were raised. The sample consisted of fifty (50) teachers from twenty (20) secondary schools in Agege Local government Area of Lagos State. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire. The data obtained were analysed using sample mean. The study found out that there is significant influence of prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language on students' academic performance in Literature-in- English. Also, there is significant relationship between Yoruba figurative language and Literature-in-English. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that students learn and remember new information best when it is linked to relevant prior knowledge. Hence, prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language can help the improvement of students' academic performance in literature -in-English.

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## 1. Introduction

At every level of education; primary, secondary and tertiary, indigenous languages are perceived as vehicles for effective learning of other subjects. Studies including Hadley and Hamayan, L. (2000), Adeyemi A. (2002); Ajayi B. (2007), Tsaure (2024), have indicated that indigenous languages have the potential for enhancing students' learning and achievement. The colonial pattern of education had robbed the African Child of inventiveness, originality and creativity, since he was forced to think in English instead of in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo or any other Nigerian language. Fafunwa, therefore, argued that; If a Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire those skills and attitudes through the mother tongue as the medium of education which after all is the most natural way of learning.

Seasoned language scholars such as Adam et al (2024), Oyesomi, K., & Salawu, A. (2019). Agyekum, K. (2007). and Adewoyin (2006) have discussed the importance of Yoruba figurative language in increasing students' academic performance, which was the study's focus. Many research efforts have been carried out on the study of Yoruba language and literature, of all which reiterated that people have neglected the fact that someone who seize to retain where they come from seize to become relevant.

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Figurative language is described by Tuhin et al (2022), Kosimov (2022) and ferguson (2024) as 'a conspicuous departure from what competent users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect.' Figures of speech are sometimes described as primarily poetic, but they are integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse. Agyekum (2007) describes it as 'a sort of comparison based on association; and in meaning which must be inferred or derived from larger cognitive, cultural or environmental context.' Shardanma (2013) posits that it is employed in performing arts as a medium of expressing thoughts, feelings and ideas implicitly rather than explicitly. According to Brown (2004) figurative language is the form of a single word or phrase; it can be a special repetition, arrangement or omission of words with literal meaning, or a phrase with a specialized meaning not based on literal meaning of words.

Yoruba language is one of the three major languages of Nigeria, the other two being Hausa and Igbo. It is the mother tongue of a substantial number of speakers in South-West Nigeria and outside Nigeria, for instance, in Togo and the Republic of Benin. The traits of Yoruba language remain in the oral literatures of Yoruba descendants now domiciled in Brazil, Cuba and parts of West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago. In Nigeria, where it has the bulk of the speakers, its spoken mainly in Lagos, Ondo, Kwara, Ogun, Ekiti, Oyo and Osun States as well as in parts of Kogi and Edo States. The speakers are contiguously located in South-West Nigeria (Adetugbo, 1967; Awobuluyi 1998)

Yoruba along with Hausa and Igbo has the status of a national language. It was legislated by the National Assembly in section 55 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Also, along with Hausa and Igbo, Yoruba was prescribed in the National Policy on Education (2013; sections 5,10,11,8,14) as a language to be used as a medium of instruction in pre-primary, lower primary schools and to be studied as a subject in junior and senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Yoruba language possesses rich folklores, comprising most importantly proverbs, riddles and song verses. When speech are lost, the proverbs is a means through which we hunt for it and whose meaning only lies in the deeper understanding of the language, literal interpretation of such Yoruba sentences loose the real meaning to both speaker and the listener.

Yoruba figurative language is a type of language that varies from the norm of literal meaning in which words mean exactly what they say, also known as the "ornament of language" (ewà-èdè). Yoruba figurative language does not exactly mean what they say but instead forces readers to make an imaginative leap in order to comprehend an authors' point. In other words, Yoruba figurative language is parallel to plain language because of the underlying meaning that it carries.

Yoruba figurative language refers to the more of expression in which words as re-employed to connote something other than the literal or conceptual meaning; It adds beauty, emotional sensitivity or transfer the authors' impression or thought through comparing or identifying something or a person with another one that has meaning which the reader is familiar with, these devices are mostly used in poetry, in song-poetry, performing artist used them to dress the content of their speech idea or thought. It involves any use of language where the intended meaning differs from the actual literal meaning of the words themselves. They are situational or context bound; Yoruba figurative languages are employed as a medium of expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas implicitly rather than explicitly. These techniques of language use, which can rightly be called figurative language according to Babalola, (2001), and Amali, (2005) include metaphor (Àfiwé-tàárà), simile (Àfiwé-eléloó), hyperbole (Asorégèé), personification (Ifohúnpèniyan), onomatopoeia (ifirómorisi), Irony (èdà-òrò) and oxymoron (kanlo-ayàwóran-atakora).

The influence of prior knowledge on context can drive the learning of a new knowledge, (Igwe, 2003). Prior knowledge activation facilitates learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2014). Recent literature indicates that there has been limited advancement on the importance of Yoruba Figurative language. According to Anderson and Pichert, (2001); the prior knowledge of a person has a potential influence on what he or she will learn and remember. Yoruba figurative language on the academic performance of students in literature-in-English has influence and it is a mean of manifesting the relevance of Yoruba on teaching and learning of

literature. The influence of prior knowledge on teaching and learning cannot be overemphasised considering its impact towards driving academic success in a similar but nonetheless the same area like Yoruba figurative as evidenced in literature-in-English which was the vacuum this research intended to fill.

Literature-in-English is a major school subject that equips students with language and other soft skills needed for entry into the workforce. For students to acquire the skills, effective teaching, which is dependent on the availability of basic teaching–learning resources, is essential. Education is underfunded in Nigeria. This singular act has inadvertently affected the quality of teaching and impedes students' learning abilities.

The use of literature in the English language classroom has gained some grounds and is enjoying several privileges for several reasons. The role of literature in the English language classroom has been reassessed and many views literary texts as providing rich linguistic input, effective stimuli for students to express themselves, and a potential source of learner motivation. This paper therefore examined the use of literature as a commendable tool for teaching the English language. It also examined the concept of literature, language, the relationship between language and literature, the reasons for its teaching and learning in the English language classroom.

Previous studies have also suggested that literature can enhance the psycholinguistic aspect of language learning by improving vocabulary expansion, reading skills, form and discourse processing skills (Ali & Ahmed, 2015; Mart, 2018; Guetatlia & Hamane, 2022). Literature can serve as a source of linguistic input, stimulate learners' self-expression, enhance learner motivation, and offer authentic materials for EFL classrooms (Shtokhman, 2022; Ugoji, 2016).

Overall, literature can be a useful tool for language learning and can help learners improve their language skills, cultural awareness, and personal development.... One of the reasons is that literature can provide examples of language use in context, which is essential in EFL contexts where learners rarely use English in their daily conversation (Zakarneh & Mahmoud, 2021). Literature can also be used as an effective tool for learning English and enhancing the four main language skills (Rahayu, 2011). Moreover, reading literary works encourages learners to develop their understanding and analysing ability, which is one of the main goals of teaching English (Karatay, 2017).

There are different approaches to the teaching of literature. Carter and Long (1991), as cited in Savvidou (2004), discussed three approaches or models: cultural, language, and personal growth. As its name suggests the first model's emphasis is to expose learners to other cultures. Thus, the socio-political and historical contexts o each text is explored. The language model presents literature as a tool for language learning while the personal growth model emphasizes the relevance of literature to daily life.

The three models, which could serve as guidelines for successful classroom instruction, also establish the importance of literature as a school subject. Cultural awareness, for example, is one of the objectives of post-basic education in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education states that education should be used to promote Nigerian art and culture and foster patriotism, national unity, and diversity (FRN, 2014). In that sense, literature teaching becomes a means of realizing one of the goals of basic education. Students could be asked to compare and contrast the cultural contexts of the novel or drama with their own culture. Literature-In-English is basically a manipulation of language in different contexts.

**Statement of the Problem**

Prior knowledge of a topic could help to link and drive easy understanding of related topic. The failure rate of students in literature-in-English is highly disheartening as stipulated by the West African Examinations Council's Chief Examiner's Report for 2020-2024. Scholars have faulted the teaching methodology adopted by teachers of this subject, while, some scholars have sought solution to this problem via teaching literature-in-English through the use of mother tongue. There is, therefore, need to explore the abstract nature of the Yoruba figurative language in teaching and learning of literature-in-English hence the gap that this research work intends to fill.

The situation is critical and points to a crisis of teaching and learning in Literature-in-English classrooms. Urgent interventions are needed if the objectives of this school subject are

to be achieved. Studying Literature-in-English as a school subject goes beyond reading a piece of literary work and being able to retell the storyline. It is also not sufficient to know the subject matter in the text alone as Literature-in-English students need to be able to read the text, appreciate it, and engage in meaningful discussions in order to arrive at a deeper level of comprehension.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study will be carried out with the aim of researching into the influence of the prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language in the academic performance of students in literature-in-English, for this reason the objectives study are to:

1. identify factors that may pose as problems facing the teaching of literature-in-English using figurative language;
2. determine the effects of such problems on students' academic performance in literature-in-English;
3. reveal the ways of using Yoruba figurative language in teaching of literature-in-English;
4. ascertain. the areas where Yoruba figurative language can help teach literature-in-English; and
5. suggest solutions to the identified problems faced by teachers when teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language.

**Research Questions**

i. What is teachers' perception of students in teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language
ii. What is the level of students' prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English as perceived by teachers?
iii. What is the perception of teachers on the use of Yoruba figurative language and literature –in –English

**Schema Theory of Prior Knowledge**

Sir Frederic Charles Bartlett (1886-1969) was a British psychologist, the first professor of experimental psychology at the University of Cambridge and one of the precursors of cognitive psychology. The schema theory was one of the leading cognitive learning theories and was introduced by Bartlett in 1932 and further developed in the '70s by Richard Anderson. Bartlett advanced this concept to provide a basis for a temporal alternative to traditional spatial storage theories of memory, since schema theory describes the way knowledge is acquired, processed and cerebrally organized.

The schema theory explores the recall of Native American folktales, Bartlett noticed that many recalls were not accurate and involved the replacement of unfamiliar information with facts already known. To categorize this class of memory errors, Bartlett suggested that human beings apparently possess generic knowledge in the form of unconscious mental structures and that these structures produce schematized errors in recall when they interact with incoming information.

Thus, it is through schemata that old knowledge influences new information. So, basically, schemata (plural of schema) are psychological concepts that were proposed as a form of mental representation for selected chunks of complex knowledge, which are then stored in the long-term memory.

## 2. Method

This study utilised a descriptive research design. The questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature, validated instruments, and the specific research objectives of the study. Input from subject matter experts (e.g., educational researchers, experienced teachers, or psychometricians) was incorporated to ensure relevance and content validity. Demographic characteristics of the sample (e.g., gender, years of experience, geographic distribution) were collected during the survey. The sample was assessed for representativeness based on key characteristics demographics.

Twenty schools were sampled out of which, 25 Yoruba teachers and 25 Literature-in-English teachers were selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The instruments used in gathering data were Yoruba Teachers Questionnaire (YTO) and Literature Teachers Questionnaire (TO). The two questionnaires had twenty (20) items each which were divided into two parts, which comprised of sections A and B. Section A contained demographic data of the respondents, while, section B had a list of structured statements regarding the influence of prior knowledge of Yoruba Figurative Language in the academic performance of student on English Literature. The questionnaires are based on four-point Likert scale provided for each of the question. The options ranged from Yoruba Teachers Questionnaire (YTQ) and Literature Teachers Questionnaire (TQ) were designed for this study. The two questionnaires with twenty (20) items were divided into two parts, which comprised sections A and B. Section A contained respondents' demographic data, while, section B had a list of structured statements regarding the influence of prior knowledge of Yoruba Figurative Language in the academic performance of students in Literature-in-English. The data obtained were analysed using simple percentage.

**Results and Discussion**

This chapter presents results of the findings of the study based on the data collected. It presents the bio data of the respondents, answer to research questions and discussion of findings

**Demographic Data of Respondents**

**Table 1 Gender, Experience and Academic Qualification of participants**

| **Gender** | **Frequency distribution** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 23 | 46 |
| Female | 27 | 54 |
| **Total** | **50** | **100** |
| **Experience** | | |
| 3-9 | 12 | 24 |
| 10-Above | 38 | 76 |
| **Total** | **50** | **100** |
| Qualification | | |
| NCE | 12 | 24 |
| B.sc | 34 | 68 |
| Masters | 04 | 8 |
| **Total** | **50** | **100** |

Table 1 shows that there 23 (46%) male teachers and there are 27 (54%) females' teachers in the study. It also showed that 12 of the years have between 3-9 years' experience, 38 teachers has experience of 10 years and above. The academic qualification showed that majority of the teachers have B.sc and 12 of have NCE while 4 have masters.

**Research Questions**

1. What is teachers' perception of students in teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language?

***Table 2 Mean and Standard deviation of Teachers Perception of students in teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language***

| ***S/N*** | ***Statement*** | ***Mean*** | ***Std*** | ***Remark*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students who are proficient users of Yoruba figures of speech are also proficient users of figures of speech in Literature-in-English. | 2.88 | .299 | Negative |
| 2 | Students who easily understand Yoruba figures of speech also find it easy to understand figures of speech used in Literature-in-English. | 2.78 | .520 | Negative |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Students find Literature-in- English difficult | 3.26 | .341 | Negative |
| 4 | Student find Yoruba figurative language difficult | 2.51 | .620 | Negative |
| 5 | Students performance is very poor in Literature-in-English | 2.58 | .339 | Negative |
| 6 | Students understanding of Yoruba figurative language is poor | 2.76 | .774 | Negative |
| | Weighted Mean | **2.79** | **.482** | **Negative** |

Table 2 shows the result of teachers' perception of students in teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language. To obtain bench mark score, the result used 2.5 criterion mean for decision (Mean > 2.5). Mean obtained above the criterion mean were accepted as negative while mean below 2.5 were taken as positive. The result shows that all the six (6) items were rated above the criterion mean. This implies that 100% of the items were rated above the criterion mean, also the table shows grand mean of 2.79 which is above the criterion mean Thus, teachers perceive students to find teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language difficult.

2. What is the level of students' prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English as perceived by teachers?

***Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation Description of Prior Knowledge of*** Yoruba figurative language and literature in English

| **S/N** | **Items** | ***Mean*** | ***Std*** | ***Remark*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students who have background knowledge of the use of Yoruba figures of speech usually do better in Literature-in-English. | 2.00 | .375 | Low |
| 2 | Prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language often impede with students' understanding of figures of speech in Literature-in-English | 2.46 | .190 | Low |
| 3 | Accurate interpretation of figurative sentences in Yoruba will aid comprehension of figurative sentences in Literature-in-English. | 2.40 | .118 | Low |
| 4 | Students who do not have prior knowledge of Yoruba figures of speech often perform better in Literature-in-English than those who have the knowledge. | 2.38 | .470 | Low |
| 5 | Students who have good understanding of Yoruba figures of speech are usually more interested in learning Literature-in-English. | 1.53 | .033 | Low |
| 6 | Linking new subject matter to prior knowledge increases a student's inferential comprehension of literature-in-English | 2.33 | .522 | Low |
| 7 | Prior knowledge serves as an assimilative context for literature-in-English | 1.69 | .300 | Low |
| 8 | Exposing students to Yoruba figurative language will be a background for teaching literature- in-English | 1.92 | .543 | Low |
| 9 | There is significant difference in the achievement of students who had prior knowledge in Yoruba figurative language | 2.00 | .500 | Low |
| 10 | Prior knowledge can be tested by administering pre-test before any subject matter | 2.12 | .651 | Low |
| | Total | 2.08 | 0.37 | Low |

Table 3 shows the result of students' prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English as perceived by teachers. The result used 2.5 criterion mean for decision (Mean > 2.5). Mean obtained above the criterion mean were accepted while mean below 2.5 were rejected. The result shows that all the items were rated below the criterion mean. This implies that 100% of the items were rated below the criterion mean, also the table shows grand mean of 2.08 which is below the criterion mean. Thus, students prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English as perceived by teachers is low.

3. What is the perception of teachers on the use of Yoruba figurative language and literature – in –English

***Table 4: Means and Standard Deviation Description of Teacher Perception about*** Yoruba figurative language and literature in English

| S/N | Statement | Mean | Std | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The usage of figurative language such as metaphor, simile, rhetorical questions e.t.c in Yoruba literature is similar in Literature-in-English. | 2.50 | .875 | Positive |
| 2 | Figurative sentences in Yoruba will retain its meaning when translated to English. | 2.62 | .810 | Positive |
| 3 | Yoruba figurative language is not in any way similar to figures of speech in Literature-in-English | 2.66 | .417 | Positive |
| 4 | Students who are proficient users of Yoruba figures of speech are also proficient users of figures of speech in Literature-in-English. | 2.57 | .510 | Positive |
| | Weighted Mean | **2.79** | **.482** | **Positive** |

Table 4 shows the result of teachers' perception of knowledge of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English. The result used 2.5 criterion mean for decision (Mean > 2.5). Mean obtained above the criterion mean were accepted while mean below 2.5 were rejected. The result shows that all the items were rated above the criterion mean. This implies that 100% of the items were rated above the criterion mean, also the table shows grand mean of 2.79 which is above the criterion mean. Thus, teachers have positive perception about Yoruba figurative language and literature in English.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Teachers' perception of students indicated that teaching literature-in-English using Yoruba figurative language was difficult. Students probably would have found it difficult because they may not be used to it at home. Another possible reason maybe that, in the society Yoruba people are not really proud of their language, most people prefer to speak English language or Pidgin English. Although, Hannifin and Saverge (2003), kik et al. (2021) and Adedigba et al. (2023) affirmed that indigenous languages have the potential for enhancing students learning and achievement, most of these languages are fast going into extinction. Also, Onafuwa (2003), Adewoyin (2006), Musa (2022), Fasinro et al. and Adams (2024) recognized the importance of Yoruba figurative language in the increased academic performance of students which shall be the focus of this work.

According to Igwe (2003) the influence of a prior knowledge of a context can drive the learning of a new knowledge. Prior knowledge activation facilitates learning (Bereiter, 2005), Ehinma (2017), Adisa (2023) and Fabiyi (2023). Recent literature indicates that there has been limited advance on the importance of Yoruba figurative language. The influence of prior knowledge on teaching and learning cannot be over-emphasised but it impacts in driving

academic success in similar but not the same area like Yoruba figurative in literature-in-English is a bridge where this research intends to fill.

Prior knowledge plays a mediating role in generating constructive activity (Chan et al., 1992), and the quality of study materials can affect a student's prior knowledge and indirectly his/her performance (Dochy, 1992). Research also shows that prior knowledge is potentially an important contributing variable in explaining post-test variance (Dochy, 1992, Bittermann et al. 2023, Nawaf, 2023). Mabonga (2021) posits that Prior knowledge is crucial, not only in learning curriculum, but in appreciation of a subject (which in turn, reinforces performance). Not only will students' participation increase when they feel they know something about the topic, but opportunities to expand on their prior knowledge will grow during the interactions with classmates and the teacher. Fatokun and Omenesa's (2015), result confirmed that prior knowledge enhances learning as it is essential to the attainment of stated instructional objectives. It is the existing knowledge structure on which a student key in new idea learnt.

Similarly, Mbah (2015), investigated the effects of prior knowledge of topics and the instructional objectives on students' achievement in literature-in-English and found that the use of prior knowledge of instructional objectives amongst students enhances their achievement in Literature-in-English. The study also finds that teacher have positive perception of Yoruba figurative language and literature in English. Teachers who link classroom activities and instruction to prior knowledge build on their students' familiarity with a topic and enable students to connect the curriculum content to their own culture and experience. The teacher has the ability to positively or negatively affect the pupils' performance. The duty of the teacher is to enable pupils to reap the benefits of studying Literature in English by being conversant in his or her content. Most teachers provide the correct content and some even the appropriate methodology. A seemingly insignificant aspect of the teacher however, threatens the performance of students,' thus, teachers' perception is equally of paramount importance.

## 4. Conclusion

The study explored the influence of prior knowledge of Yoruba figurative language on students' academic performance in Literature-in-English, with the aim of understanding how linguistic and cultural familiarity shapes students' engagement and success in the subject. The high failure rate in Literature-in-English across schools is a growing concern, prompting scholars to critique the predominantly rigid and monolingual teaching methodologies currently employed. The findings of this study affirm that prior knowledge plays a significant role in the academic performance of students in Literature-in-English, especially when it involves figurative language. When students possess a foundational understanding of Yoruba figurative expressions, such as proverbs, idioms, metaphors, and personifications, they are better equipped to interpret and analyze similar literary devices in English texts. Moreover, the study concluded that a major obstacle to leveraging Yoruba figurative knowledge is the systematic discouragement of the use of indigenous languages during students' formative years. Many students grow up in educational and social environments that favor English and marginalize local languages, which leads to a disconnect from the cultural and linguistic resources that could otherwise enhance their understanding of literature.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the light of the findings of this study:

i. Teachers should always consider students prior knowledge when setting objectives
ii. Teachers should educate students on the advantage of using Yoruba figurative languages
iii. Also, teachers should explain each Yoruba figurative language expressions used in the teaching/learning process.
iv. Students should be given adequate and relevant assignments on Yoruba figurative language before coming to class as this will ignite their previous knowledge.

v. Teachers should consider integrating elements of students' mother tongue—especially in the teaching of figurative language—to bridge comprehension gaps and foster deeper literary analysis

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