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**PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF THE READING  
SKILLS OF THE LINGUISTIC ENGLISH-IMMERSION  
STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA**

**Olajumoke Elizabeth Ajala\***

**Gbenga Fakuade#**

**Abstract**

*The Linguistic Immersion Program of the University of Ilorin is an adequately prepared English learning platform equipped with all the essentialities required towards effective productive and receptive skills of non-English speakers. The 37 Francophone students' reading skills were analyzed at 3 different stages. The study aims at ascertaining whether the learner's mother tongue enhances or inhibits their reading skills in English; investigates the types of difficulties encountered during reading using  $H_0$  and  $H_1$  as correspondences with  $p=0.05$  as the value of measurement, and to examine the strategies used by the students in reading. Top-down theory, which gave the students the opportunity to rely on their background knowledge and experiences while learning English language, was adopted. Background knowledge helped in understanding the similarities and differences between both languages while reading. This study concluded that the significant improvement in the reading skills of the students at the end of the Immersion Programme is sufficient proof that reading can be developed through continuous practice. The study recommended that language teachers should encourage students to be more involved in the art of reading.*

**Keywords:** Productive Skills, Receptive Skills, Linguistics Immersion Programme, Top-down theory, language transfer.

**Introduction**

In today's world, with the help of modern technology, English has become the most dominant language used internationally. The increasing demand for English language in higher education and research over the last decades is often assumed to be an unavoidable process which results in improved international academic communication worldwide (Balan, 2011). Special programmes of English language training and cultural exchange are thereby designed to help students practise the use of English, as well as to keep them abreast of the latest development in modern English usage. For students who are learning a second or

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\* Uskudar University, Istanbul, turkey

# University of Ilorin, Nigeria

foreign language, according to Riverdale (2008), reading is the most crucial skill to master due to several reasons. First, students can perform at a higher level in reading than in any other skills. They can accurately understand written materials that they could not discuss orally or in writing with equivalent accuracy or thoroughness.

The Linguistic Immersion Centre of the University of Ilorin has a well packaged curriculum in English that caters for all the language needs of the English immersion students. Reading skills constitute an essential part of this curriculum. The assessment of the students' performances in order to determine their competencies in reading, throughout the one-year Linguistic immersion programme forms the basis of this research work. These English language learners are faced with different learning problems due to language transfer and interference from French and their diverse native languages. These language problems are often brought into the target language (English) they are learning. It is expected that learning difficulties, as regards errors in performance manifested in their reading quest should be at a reduced rate as they proceed from one level of immersion to another, until the end of the immersion programme.

### **Materials and Methods**

So far, there are four main theories which explain the nature of learning to read. First, is the traditional theory or bottom-up theory, which focuses on the printed form of a text. Second, the cognitive theory or top-down theory which enhances the role of background knowledge in addition to what appears on the printed page (Omaggio, 1993). The third, according to Block (1992), is the metacognitive theory, which is based on the control and manipulation that a reader can have on the act of comprehending a text, and thus, emphasizes the involvement of the reader's thinking about what he is doing while reading. The schema theory is the fourth according to Smith (1991). It describes in detail how the background knowledge of the learner interacts with the reading task and illustrates how a student's knowledge and previous experience with the world is crucial to deciphering a text.

This research work was based on bottom-up and top-down theories as both theories share similarities as the interactions between both theories are intricately interwoven. Both theories are relevant to this research work because they afford the selected Francophone learners of English language at the Linguistic Immersion Centre of the University of Ilorin the opportunity to rely on their background knowledge and experiences which is

germane and of great use to them, while learning English language. Although, their French background might lead to possible language transfer, but also, cases such as borrowing, which exists between both languages was of great help to these students as their background knowledge helped in understanding the similarities and differences between French and English language.

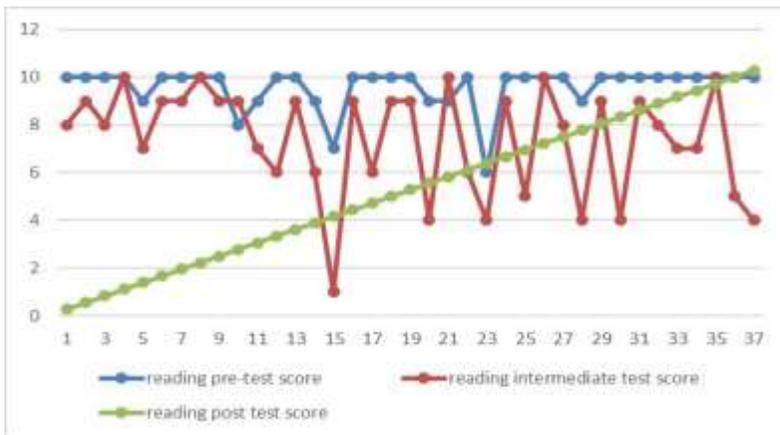
Also, triangulation method refers to the combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. By combining multiple observers, theories, methods and empirical materials, researchers hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer, and single-theory studies. For the purpose of this study, the triangulation method was used in combining graphical trend analysis for reading test scores and bar charts illustrations of students test performances in reading as well as inferential statistical packages such as a correlation analysis of the relationship between reading time and test scores; the use of  $H_a$  and  $H_1$  (null and alternative hypothesis) by testing 6 hypotheses; ANOVA test of difference in means of reading time between levels of test; ANOVA test of difference in means of reading scores between levels of tests; Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) analyses of reading tests questionnaires.

Also, the triangulation method used for this research also included surveys through observations; interview; focus-group discussion and administering of Likert scale questionnaires. In order to analyze the students' performances in reading, the researcher engaged all the newly admitted students at the linguistics immersion centre of the University of Ilorin (2018/2019 set) in series of task-based reading activities divided into three levels respectively; pre-reading, intermediate reading and post-reading. The students read descriptive, expository and argumentative texts at different stages of the immersion programme and completed corresponding reading comprehension tests. For this purpose, interesting reading materials were selected from their curriculum and this also served as a viable method for bringing back the students' interest in actual reading.

The readers were equally asked in the interview section which of the reading skills techniques namely; skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading they found easier to adopt while reading and answering the reading comprehension texts assigned. Also, the students were asked to complete Likert-scale questionnaires after reading the comprehension passage at the three different levels of tests conducted. The reading

questionnaires administered in the course of this study were a four-point Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from agree, strongly agree to disagree and strongly disagree which indicated the students' preferences. The items on these questionnaires elicit information on the students' language background, the mother-tongue of the respondents, language resources, attitude towards English language, and the use of English language within and outside the classroom.

## **Results and Discussion**



**Fig 1: Trend Analysis of Reading Test Scores**

Figure 1 shows the reading test scores of all the 37 students who enrolled for the 1-year English immersion programme at the Linguistics Immersion Centre of the University of Ilorin for the 2017/2018 academic session. In order to ascertain the reading skill of these students in English language with regards to their ability to read by either skimming or scanning, detailed/ extensive reading, and how they fully comprehend what is being read, they were subjected to series of reading tests namely; the pre-test, intermediate test and the post-test from the beginning of the immersion programme to the end of the programme within a space of 3 months intervals between each test conducted. The performances of these students at each level of reading test were recorded and their test scores were statistically analyzed as presented in the trend analysis above. According to the figure, the students were not consistent in their scores. This is evident in the zig-zag shape of the graph as the blue colour signified all the 37 students' pre-test reading scores; the red colour represented their

intermediate scores while the green colour represented their post-test reading scores.

**Hypothesis One:**

H01: There is no relationship between reading time and scores

HA1: There is relationship between reading time and scores

**Table 1: Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Reading time and Scores**

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Reading Score</b>	<b>Reading Time</b>
Reading Score	Pearson	1	-.038
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)		.824
	N	37	37
Reading Time	Pearson	-.038	1
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.824	
	N	37	37

Table 1 shows the correlation analysis of the relationship between the reading scores and time. This was carried out by polling the scores at the three levels of test and their corresponding reading times. The result showed that the correlation coefficient between the reading time and scores was -0.038 ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). The results showed that significant relationship did not exist between scores and time. However, a negative relationship existed between the scores and time. This implied that the higher the reading time, the lower the score. This is in agreement with the a priori expectation of the study that students who easily understand a comprehension passage read faster and score better.

**Hypothesis Two:**

H02: There is no difference in means of reading time between levels of test

HA2: There is difference in means of reading time between levels of test

**Table 2: ANOVA Test of Difference in Means of Reading Time between Levels of Test**

<b>Reading Time</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	813410.883	2	406705.441	24.452	.000
Within Groups	1796343.351	108	16632.809		
Total	2609754.234	110			

Table 2 shows the ANOVA test of difference in means of reading time between levels of test among the students. The reading time was converted to a common base of time to avoid biased test of difference in means. The table shows the F-value of 24.452 against the F-tabulated 19.00. The results reveal that there is significant difference in the means of reading time between the levels of test. It could be inferred from the above that the longer they stay in the English immersion programme, the shorter the time spent reading and vice versa.

### **Hypothesis Three**

H03: There is no difference in means of reading scores between levels of test

HA3: There is difference in means of reading scores between levels of test

**Table 3: ANOVA Test of Difference in Means of Reading Scores between Levels of Test**

<b>Reading Score</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between B Groups	97.600	2	48.800	22.939	000
Within Groups	229.754	108	2.127		
Total	327.354	110			

Table 3 shows the ANOVA test of difference in means of reading scores between levels of test among the students. The reading scores were converted to a common base of score to avoid biased test of difference in means. The table shows the F-value of 48.800 against the F-tabulated 19.00. The results reveal that there is significant difference in the means of reading scores between the levels of test. It could be inferred from the above that the longer they stay in the English immersion programme, the higher their scores and vice versa due to better understanding.

#### Hypothesis Four

H04: English learning has no influence on basic use of English words

HA4: English learning has influence on basic use of English words

**Table 4: Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Pre-Test Reading Questionnaire**

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree Strongly 4	$X^2$	$X^2$	Dec.
1	I found the topic of the passage	5.4%	27%	48.6%	43.2%	26.24	7.815	Sig.
	<b>Interesting</b>							
2	I think the passage was easy to Understand	5.4%	3.1%	40.45%	45.9%	19.97	7.81	Sig.
3	I think the passage was difficult to Understand	54.1%	5.1%	5.4%	5.4%	25.37	7.81	Sig.
4	I was familiar with most of the vocabularies in the	8.1%	3.4%	32.4%	54.1%	23.21	7.81	Sig.
	<b>Passage</b>							
5	I could tell what the passage was about after the first Reading	5.4%	6.2%	29.7%	48.6%	15.43	7.81	Sig.
6	I couldn't	40.5%	0.5%	5.4%	13.5%	14.78	7.81	Sig.

	understand what the passage was about after several Reading								
7	I use my knowledge and Personal experience to help me understand the topic.	5.4%	3.1%	64.0%	21.6%	33.59	7.81	Sig.	
8	Before I start to read, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to Read.	16.2%	3.5%	45.9%	24.3%	9.595	7.81	Sig.	
9	While reading, compare what I understand with what I already know about the topic.	8.1%	5.4%	27.0%	59.5%	27.54	7.81	Sig.	
10	After reading, think back to how I read, and about what I might do differently next time	10.8%	1.6%	-	67.6%	20.16	7.81	Sig.	

### **Hypothesis Five**

H05: English learning has no influence on intermediate use of English words

HA5: English learning has influence on intermediate use of English words

**Table 5: Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Intermediate-Test Reading Questionnaire**

No	Statement	Strongly			Strongly	$X^2$	$X^2$	Dec.
		Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	-Cal.	-Tab.	
1	I found the topic of the passage interesting	8.1%	2.7%	24.3%	64.9%	30.78	7.815	Sig.
2	I notice a lot of differences between my mother tongue and English language while reading	2.7%	10.8%	24.3%	62.2%	11.97	7.815	Sig.
3	I notice a lot of similarities between my mother tongue and English language while reading	10.8%	40.5%	10.8%	62.2%	4.189	7.815	Sig.
4	I prefer reading in my mother tongue than in English language	10.8%	40.5%	37.8%	10.8%	32.081	7.815	Sig.
5	I think the passage was easy to Understand	2.7%	8.1%	27.0%	62.2%	24.22	7.815	Sig.
6	I think the passage was difficult to Understand	25%	58.3%	11.1%	5.6%	34.027	7.815	Sig.
7	I could tell what the passage was about after the first reading	2.7%	10.8%	21.6%	64.9%	8.946	7.815	Sig.
8	I couldn't understand what the passage was about after several Reading	16.2%	45.9%	16.2%	21.6%	28.62	7.815	Sig.
9	I use my knowledge and personal experience to help me understand the topic	5.4%	13.5%	62.2%	18.9%	39.86	7.815	Sig.
10	After reading, I think back to how I read, and about what I might do differently next time	5.4%	2.7%	24.3%	67.7%	16.41	7.85	Sig.

### Hypothesis Six

H06: English learning has no influence on advance use of English words

HA6: English learning has influence on advance use of English words

**Table 6: Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) Analysis of Post-Test Reading Questionnaire**

No	Statement	Strongly		Strongly		$X^2$	$X^2$	Dec.
		Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree		-Tab.	
		1	2	3				
1	I found the topic of the passage interesting	-	-	67.6	32.4	4.568	7.815	Not Sig.
2	I prefer a descriptive reading text to an argumentative text	-	37.8	24.3	37.8	1.351	7.815	Not Sig.
3	I prefer an expository reading text to an argumentative text	16.2	37.8	21.6	24.3	3.757	7.815	Not Sig.
4	I think the passage was confusing because many speakers were involved in the Dialogue	18.9	43.2	5.4	32.4	11.97	7.815	Not Sig.
5	I think the passage was easy to understand	16.2	24.3	2.7	56.8	23.43	7.815	Sig.
6	I think the passage was difficult to understand	29.7	51.4	2.7	16.0	19.10	7.815	Sig.
7	I could tell what the passage was about after the first reading	5.4	24.3	24.3	45.9	12.189	7.815	Sig.
8	I couldn't understand what the passage was about after several Reading	27.0	48.6	10.8	13.5	13.270	7.815	Sig.

9	I used my knowledge and personal experience to help me understand the topic	2.7	5.4	67.6	24.3	39.865	7.815	Sig.
10	After reading, I think back to how I read, and about what I might do differently next time.	11.1	11.1	16.7	61.1	25.33 3	7.815	Sig.

### Conclusion

All the reading test scores and analysis of the students' questionnaires assigned at the three levels of test showed that a lower percentage of the Linguistic immersion students read, or even use English language as a medium of expression outside the classrooms of the Linguistic Immersion Centre of the University of Ilorin. In addition, a greater percentage of the students pledged loyalty to reading in their mother tongue than in English language just as a greater number of the students said they relied on their previous knowledge and past experiences to help them understand the reading comprehension passages easier at the pre-test than at the intermediate and post-test; while most agreed to do things differently next time they are given reading tests. It is therefore inferred from this analysis that the insufficient exposure of the students to the target language (English) is one of the contributing factors to their poor performances in the language, hence, continuous practice is advised. It is also recommended that language teachers should encourage students to be more involved in the art of reading.

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