

RESEARCH PROPOSAL.

THE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL THEMES IN ENGLISH COMPREHENSION PASSAGES FOR SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' WORLDVIEW.

Background to the Study.

The English Language education in Nigeria is both an academic subject and a social instrument of communication, identity construction and cultural transmission. It has taken the central stage in the Nigerian educational system not only by being used as a medium of instruction in all subjects at upper primary level to tertiary levels but also by the fact that, mastering the language determines academic excellence, career advancement, and even national debate (Ajayi, 2006). In this respect, pedagogical materials utilized in teaching English, in particular, comprehension passages, turn out to be not only the tools of language learning. They are cultural mirrors and lenses with which the learners can interpret and interact with social realities.

The passages to understand are not neutral especially those in school textbooks and those in public examinations like WAEC and NECO. They possess implicit assumptions regarding society, values, norms and worldviews that are acceptable. These readings are not just tests of the capacity of learners to unravel meaning or to guess intentions; they socialize students into specific forms of perception of the world. These cultural aspects are often overlooked by students, teachers and even curriculum developers, but they have a very strong influence on identity, belief systems, and reality perceptions. Language in education, as Schleppegrell (2004) claims, is never ideologically neutral, but it bears cultural, political and epistemological burden.

Work in the culturally diverse society of Nigeria where students are of more than 250 ethnic groups, each with its own worldview, values, and traditions, makes it essential to have culturally inclusive and representative content. Students have the opportunity to relate to the experiences provided, apply background knowledge to new knowledge, and make meaning when comprehension texts are culturally familiar. Schema theory research confirms that prior knowledge is very useful in developing reading comprehension (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Anderson, 1977). On the other hand students can experience cognitive obstacles that hinder comprehension when the text is full of foreign references or when it depicts alien social environments. Furthermore, recurrent reading of such texts can also be an insidious way of transmitting the idea that other cultures are better or more standard than one is, and this eventually leads to self-esteem and cultural insecurity (Ndura, 2004; Hall, 1997).

The historical and structural biases that are inherent in the Nigerian educational content raise a major concern. Most of the English textbooks in the secondary schools are either directly imported or based on the British textbooks, and little localization is done (Olajide, 2010). Consequently, there are passages of understanding that frequently include Western culture, expressions, way of life, and social norms. Although some of these texts might be globally inclusive, they often omit or sidelines the reality of the student in Nigeria. Take, as an illustration, a passage about skiing in the Alps or a Thanksgiving dinner which is grammatically correct and well structured, but does not resonate with the culture of the majority of learners in Nigeria. Adegbija (2004) indicates that this type of exclusion develops a hidden curriculum that belittles the indigenous culture and makes foreign ways of life the norm.

This issue is not trivial. It is connected with the role of education in building national identity and global citizenship. When students are regularly presented with texts that reinforce foreign cultural allusions, there is a potential that they will slowly end up with a distorted perception of what society deems as good, and what is perceived as normal or desirable. The Cultivation Theory, introduced by Gerbner (1969), is an explanation of the effects of the repetitive exposure to certain narratives or symbols in media on the minds of the people who perceive the reality. When applied to reading passages, the theory implies that students can start to internalize the values and ideologies that are contained in such passages as normative, even in situations when these values and ideologies are incompatible with the cultural background of the students.

The consequences of such exposure are multifaceted. On the one hand, it may cause a kind of cultural alienation as the students may feel a liking to the foreign lifestyle and lose interest in the local traditions, languages and customs within a certain period of time. Conversely, it can lead to identity crisis especially in adolescence, a life stage where teenagers are already finding it hard to establish themselves in the society. The risk of this cultural dissonance consists in its insidious nature: it is not forced by any means but is internalized by the reader in the course of repetition and academic approval (Apple, 1990).

Moreover, the problem of cultural representation in the educational texts also concerns the critical thinking ability of students. Texts that represent a single worldview fail to provoke students to question, compare, and reflect on other worldviews. Culturally diverse and inclusive materials, on the other hand, prompt students to question content, take different perspectives

on it, and understand that cultural identity is complex. This is imperative in the pluralistic society such as Nigeria where tolerance, empathy and intercultural competence are needed to coexist peacefully (Banks, 2001).

Although there have been some curriculum initiatives in Nigeria that have tried to increase the indigenous content, which has been reflected in the literature and citizen education curriculum, the English Language curriculum, particularly the comprehension component has not been subjected to enough questioning. The cultural assumptions of the passages to be understood are not questioned by textbook writers, examination institutions and policy makers who usually concentrate on grammar and vocabulary norms. Such supervision maintains an unbalanced pedagogy that is biased towards linguistic correctness and not cultural relevance.

It also needs to be noted that the cultural representation in the passages of comprehension is not only about the inclusion of names, foods, or places that are considered to be Nigerian. It goes deeper into the symbolic level to incorporate world views, social values, problem solving strategies and interpersonal relations that demonstrate the diversity of the Nigerian life. To give an example, a text that discusses communal living, extended family structure or local proverbs can be more culturally rich than a text that contains the mention of a Nigerian name in an unfamiliar situation. By using culturally embedded materials, learners are able to identify themselves as the agents of the discourse of knowledge, as opposed to passive consumers of the imported ideals (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Moreover, teachers themselves often face a dilemma. On the one hand, they have to deliver the curriculum and prepare the students to pass the national exams, which can comprise culturally

foreign comprehension texts. Conversely, they are aware of the gap between these texts and the experience of the students. This can lead to instructional methods that focus on rote learning rather than critical thinking and this can alienate students further to any form of learning. Gay (2000) goes further to state that culturally responsive teaching involves the educator ensuring that there is a bridge between what is taught in school and cultural background of the students. This will not be possible in case the materials themselves are culturally poor or biased.

The next level of complexity is the ideological role of curriculum content. Michael Apple (1990) and other curriculum theorists have demonstrated that the school curriculum is not neutral. It echoes and supports specific ideologies, social organization and power relations. When passages in English comprehension invariably mention Western individualism, consumer culture, and technological progress, they convey implicit messages about what is respected in society. Those Nigerian students who fail to relate their communal values, indigenous knowledge systems and traditional practices to such texts might conclude that their culture is backward or irrelevant. This does not only influence personal identity but it also leads to marginalization of indigenous epistemologies in national development.

Considering the foregoing, it is apparent that the problem of cultural representation in English understanding texts is pedagogical and ideological. It begs the question of who knows what is worth knowing, who has what stories worth telling, and what values are being advanced in the classroom. It also questions the teachers and the policy makers to reconsider the objective of English Language education in the post-colonial, multicultural society.

Empirical research that critically examines the cultural content of comprehension passages and analyzes their effect on worldview of students is urgently needed. This research should not be confined to theoretical claims, but should also involve content analysis of real texts, as used in schools, and also interviews and questionnaires, to gather the views of students and teachers. In this way, we can start to create a more inclusive and culturally balanced curriculum of the English Language that does not only reinforce linguistic competence but also acknowledges the identity of the students and equips them with the tools of becoming global citizens without denying the local realities.

This research, thus, aims to address a gap in the body of knowledge that has been identified, which is the representation of cultural themes in English comprehension passages taught in the public secondary schools in Lagos State and the effect that these themes have on the worldview of students. Dwelling upon Education District IV that comprises both urban communities and diverse student populations, the study is expected to offer practical recommendations to educators, curriculum developers, and textbook publishers. In the end, the aim should be to create a more culturally responsive English Language teaching approach that will be more in line with the Nigerian educational vision and realities of its society.

Statement of the Problem.

Despite the fact that culture is a critical part of the education, the English comprehension passages that are implemented in the Nigerian secondary schools are frequently imported or based on the foreign setting (Olajide, 2010). Such passages can be values, conventions and ways of life that are alien or meaningless to the students in Nigeria. Students will eventually adopt

foreign views as the normative when they are constantly exposed to texts that give more advantages to non-indigenous cultures (Gerbner, 1969).

Such a discrepancy between the cultural content and the experiences of the students may result in the erosion of identity, less cultural self-worth, or skewed social perceptions (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Also, very few studies focus on the personal perception of students regarding the cultural topics they are exposed to or how such topics influence their worldview, self-concept, and diversity (List et al., 2024). This research thus fills this gap by examining the cultural content of the comprehension passages and examining the effects of this content in shaping the worldview of students.

Research Aim and Objectives.

The aim of this study is to examine the representation of cultural themes in English comprehension passages and assess their influence on the worldview of secondary school students in Lagos State's District IV.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the cultural themes present in English comprehension passages used in selected secondary schools.
2. Examine students' perceptions of the cultural themes in these comprehension passages.
3. Assess the influence of these cultural themes on students' worldview.
4. Explore teachers' perspectives on the cultural relevance of comprehension passages.

5. Recommend strategies for enhancing cultural balance in the selection of comprehension texts.

Research Questions.

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What cultural themes are represented in the English comprehension passages used in secondary schools?
2. How do students perceive the cultural content of these passages?
3. In what ways do the cultural themes influence students' worldview?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of the cultural relevance of comprehension passages?
5. What strategies can be adopted to ensure a culturally inclusive selection of comprehension materials?

Significance of the Study.

The research will help in the comprehension of how English comprehension material influences the socio-cultural perspective of learners (Potter, 2014). It will be beneficial to teachers as it will make them more deliberate when it comes to the choice of culturally responsive materials.

Students will be advantaged since they will be more conscious of the effect that the materials they read have on their thoughts, identity and their perception of other people (Anderson, 1977). The study will be of help to curriculum planners, textbook writers and examination

bodies as they revise or develop content that is culturally balanced and relevant (Udeh & Onwanyi, 2024).

At a more general level, the paper contributes to the debate of indigenizing education and maintaining cultural identity in the globalized world. It also provides empirical data that can be used in future policy decisions regarding the development of textbooks and the selection of instructional material in Nigeria (Hall, 1997).

Scope of the Study.

This research will be limited to the public secondary schools in Education District IV of the Lagos State. It targets senior secondary school students and English Language teachers. The analysis materials will be passages of comprehension in the chosen textbooks and the past examination papers that are in use at present (Olajide, 2010). Other aspects of the English Language like grammar, vocabulary, or literature will not be discussed in the study. The results could not be generalized to any other context outside the urban school setting of District IV (Aoumeur & Ziani, 2022).

Theoretical Framework.

The present study is supported by two theoretical frameworks that are interconnected with each other the Cultural Schema Theory and the Cultivation Theory. They are quite appropriate to a study that examines not only immediate understanding of texts but also the long-term effects of repeated exposure to the same culture on the world views of the learners.

Cultural Schema Theory is a cognitive theory of reading used to explain that readers use previously held knowledge structures called schemas to interpret new information (Anderson, 1977). Schemas are models of the mind that are formed on the basis of the experiences, social lives and culture of individuals. Based on this theory, reading comprehension is a constructive process that requires the use of existing cultural knowledge by the readers.

frameworks to interpret text. As the learners are exposed to texts that have familiar cultural symbols, idioms, and values, the processing of the information becomes fluid and there is enhanced understanding, increased interaction, and retention. On the other hand, culturally remote texts can cause a misunderstanding, superficial interaction, or even refusal to read the text. The Nigerian situation, in which most comprehension passages have been selected in foreign cultural environments, means that students will have difficulty in interpreting culturally mediated allusions, references, or moral values. This brings about a kind of alienation to the academic process wherein the language teaching does not relate well with the lived experience of the learners. The cultural Schema Theory thus explains why there should be culturally relevant materials in comprehension passages in order to increase accessibility, relatability and learning (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Besides the direct implications on the understanding, the paper also utilizes the Cultivation Theory to address the long-term impact of repeated exposure to the text. Cultivation Theory was first proposed by George Gerbner in the discipline of media studies which states that the people who are constantly exposed to certain depictions in media eventually start believing that these depictions are real (Gerbner, 1969). The theory was first used to describe the effects of

watching television but this has since broadened to the educational content especially the print and the textual media used in classroom teaching. Within the framework of the current study, Cultivation Theory would be useful to describe the way in which the worldviews of students, meaning their perceptions about society, norms, roles, and values can be influenced by the repetitive exposure to particular cultural stories in comprehension passages. As an illustration, in case the majority of comprehension texts depict the western family structure, gender roles, work ethics, or leisure as a norm, Nigerian students might unconsciously start viewing such constructs as ideally good, at the expense of their own cultural values (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

Moreover, Cultivation Theory assumes that it is not a sudden process but a gradual process. Repetition, consistency, and cumulative exposure are how the dominant ideologies are established in the minds of the audiences. In the case of students who read comprehension texts during the course of their education, the gradual reinforcement of certain cultural themes may lead to the internalization of attitudes that express the prevailing views of the curriculum, not the diversity of the cultures around them. Therefore, the theory plays a crucial role in assessing the wider ramification of curriculum development and text selection in addressing national identity, cultural assurance, and intercultural sensitivity among the students.

The two theories combined give a complete framework of this study. Cultural Schema Theory looks at the micro-level of cognitive and affective reactions of the students in the process of reading (Rumelhart, 1980), whereas Cultivation Theory examines the macro-level consequences of prolonged exposure to texts on identity and worldview. Their joint usage allows this research

to analyze both short-term and long-term effects of cultural representation in passages of English comprehension. With this two-lens perspective, the research does not just aim at examining the essence of the cultural themes in the texts, rather it is also intended to explain how the themes play a role in shaping the social consciousness of the learners as time goes by.

Literature Review.

Introduction.

Conceptual Review.

Culture and Language Education.

Language is deeply interwoven with culture. Cultural aspects are also inbuilt in the teaching and learning of English particularly in the use of comprehension passages. This process of transmitting culture may either be similar or contradictory to the native life of the learner. The learning environment that makes the language of instruction more privileged than the local cultural expressions promotes foreign ideologies because the local cultural expressions are not accommodated. In this way, language learning is not only a linguistic exercise but also a cultural negotiation, which shapes the identity, social standards, and a sense of belonging to the world of a learner.

Comprehension and Cultural Themes.

The successful understanding is not only the matter of the linguistic competence but also the process of arousing the background knowledge. Familiarity with a passage due to cultural knowledge enables learners to draw meaning, connections and respond to it in a critical

manner. On the other hand, culturally foreign texts have cognitive obstructions that diminish interest and restrict interpretation. Cultural background of a passage such as names, practices, festivals and values is highly important in the ability of a learner to engage a text fully. Hence, incorporation of culturally related themes is the focus of enhancing the results of understanding.

Cultural Influence on Worldview.

The worldview of a student, the prism through which he or she sees and understands the society, the values, the identity, and the difference is influenced by the constant exposure to texts and narratives. The passages in comprehension often contain (and sometimes explicitly) hidden (and not always hidden) stories of social norms, expectations and ideals. Repeated narration of these stories may affect the beliefs and attitudes of the students. In the case where students are mainly influenced by the foreign cultural standards, their beliefs of value and what is normal might change, in some cases to the disadvantage of their own, resulting in the internalized inferiority or cultural confusion.

Culturally Responsive Teaching.

This pedagogical model would require the recognition of the cultural background of students in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching enhances academic participation, emotional safety and relevance in learning. It urges teachers to adopt contents that resonate with the life experiences of students and equip them to deal with the rest of the societal ideals without compromising their backgrounds. Use of culturally affirming comprehension material has been linked to higher motivation and achievement by learners.

Cultural Representation in Curriculum Content.

The content of the curriculum plays an ideological role- it dictates what should be contained, what should be omitted, or what should be given priority. The fact that indigenous culture is marginalized in the materials used in understanding often portrays a problem in the planning of curriculum and writing of textbooks. A fair curriculum should include multicultural voices and local realities in order to empower learners and to foster cultural sustainability. In the absence of the local cultures, learners might feel dissonance between education and local cultural practice.

Theoretical Review.

Cultural Schema Theory.

CST is based on the bigger theory of schema in the cognitive psychology, which states that people will understand new information by referring them to the existing mental models or schemas (Anderson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980). Cultural schemas, in particular, are knowledge structures determined by the cultural background and life experience of a person. These schemas are essential in reading comprehension as they influence the manner in which students interpret, predict and make meaning of textual material. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) explain that comprehension is not a passive process but an interactive process between what the reader already knows and what is actually read in a text. When the reader comes across culturally familiar ideas, be it local idioms, names, customs, or settings, they can engage existing schemas, which allows them to understand more and engage more. On the other hand, in case

the cultural references used in a text are not familiar, the readers can feel cognitive dissonance, which results in being confused, misinterpreting the text, or understanding it superficially.

In the Nigerian education system where most of the context on which it bases its comprehension passages on English is of western nature, students might not identify with the material. In other words, a text on snow holidays, Halloween or Western table manners can be intellectually perceived but not emotionally or culturally appealing. This ends up lowering the interest of the learner and also jeopardizing the learning quality of the passage. The Cultural Schema Theory, thus, gives an important perspective through which the disjuncture among text and student identity may be viewed, and the importance of incorporating culturally relevant resources in comprehension teaching.

Cultivation Theory.

Cultivation Theory was a theory developed by George Gerbner and his associates in the 1960s and was a result of media studies in the understanding of how long-term exposure to certain media forms influences the perception of reality in people (Gerbner, 1969; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The theory assumes that media is a socializing agent especially when it continually shows consistent images, themes or narratives. In the long term, such representations are capable of developing attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that reflect the prevailing values in the media, irrespective of whether they correspond to the real-life experiences of the viewer. Though originally used in the context of television and film, Cultivation Theory has been later expanded to educational material, such as textbooks and classroom instruction (Potter, 2014).

Within the framework of the current study, the passages of comprehension, that are usually repeated in terms, exams, and textbooks, are regarded as the textual media that shape the way students perceive the social norms, the proper way to behave, the cultural ideals, and the value systems. In case students are constantly subjected to texts with a comprehension that idealizes western way of life, establishments, and ideals and overlooks or downplays local cultural reality, they might subconsciously start by equating foreign standards as better or more civilized. This may result in what the researchers term as cultural displacement or internalized marginalization (Hall, 1997). As an example, the repeated usage of the aspects of nuclear families, individualism, or western gender norms in texts of comprehension may transform the way the students view family life, community roles, or identity most of the time at the expense of their own cultural systems. Cultivation Theory therefore enables this study to examine the ideological long term implications of textual content. It shifts gears to internalized understanding and questions unperceived, and compound, influence of cultural messages and messages within passages used to understand English passages.

Empirical Review.

Olajide (2010) critically analyzed textbooks in the English language in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria and discovered that most of the passages in the textbooks were of foreign cultural contexts and values. There was a worrying trend in this study where use of indigenous Nigerian contexts was underrepresented or not represented at all. As per the findings, students were usually unable to connect with the content, which resulted in low engagement and a lack

of cultural identity. Olajide urged the reconsideration of the contents of the textbooks by making sure that they represent the realities of the Nigerian learners.

In a North African context, Aoumeur and Ziani (2022) examined Algerian EFL textbooks and indicated a disproportionate focus on western culture references. Their study, conducted on linguistic and content analysis, came to the conclusion that foreign control over the instructional material may cause alienation and the distortion of identity. The authors promoted the use of additional culturally appropriate examples to enhance the association of the learners with the content.

Udeh and Onwanyi (2024) investigated the effectiveness of the concept of incorporating native Nigerian folktales and cultural stories into English comprehension texts at the secondary school level. In their experimental study, which involved two groups of students who were asked to read culturally enriched texts and those who read typical materials, they discovered that students who read culturally familiar passages showed greater engagement, greater inferential comprehension and more active participation in discussions in the classroom. The authors came to a conclusion that cultural relevance has a direct influence on both affective and cognitive aspects of learning.

Fatoba and Ogunleye (2018) analysed the understanding passages in WAEC and NECO English Language papers over ten years. The results of their research showed the regularity of foreign locations, characters, and moral teachings. They said that this mismatch of culture in standardized testing may have a lasting effect on the way students view norms and ideals of

society. Their analysis raised the issue of the lack of correlation between the national curriculum aspirations and the examination content.

McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) surveyed English textbooks in use in Asia and Africa in an international research and found that globalization has resulted in the proliferation of Western-centric textbook content. These were the materials, which were usually created by foreign publishers and were not localized enough. Some of them provided symbolic representations of local culture, which were incidental and hollow. The authors suggested that glocalization process should be used to make sure that global materials are modified to local realities.

Moreover, a new research by List et al. (2024) analyzed the influence of culturally embedded comprehension texts on students critical thinking and the development of their identity. Citing a cross-cultural sample of learners in various educational contexts they discovered that learners who are exposed to text that reflects their cultural self understanding and more differentiated world views. Conversely, the subjects who had had exposure to foreign contexts portrayed traits of cultural alienation and inactive learning patterns.

All these empirical studies show a similarity in the concern that there is a cultural disjuncture between the learners and their instructional materials especially in the postcolonial context. But the majority of these studies either concentrate on wider textbook analysis or on literature texts and not much attention is given to the very genre of comprehension passages. This is the gap that the current study aims at filling by conducting a systematic study of cultural themes in comprehension materials and assessing their effect on students worldview.

Research Methodology.

The research design that will be used in this study will be descriptive survey research design, which will be a mixed-methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data. Such a design is suitable to a research that involves the investigation of not only the textual material of English comprehension passages but also subjective experiences of students and teachers. The mixed-methods strategy will help to better comprehend not only what cultural themes are out there but also how they are understood and assimilated by learners.

The population of the study will include the senior secondary school students and English Language teachers in the public secondary schools within Education District IV of Lagos State. Six schools will be randomly selected within the district. Stratified random sampling will be used to select 20 students in each school, a total of 120 students, and one English Language teacher will be selected purposely, which will give a total of 6 teachers. The data collection tools will be a structured questionnaire to be given to students, a semi-structured interview guide to be administered to teachers and a content analysis checklist to assess the occurrence and the nature of cultural themes in the comprehension passages that will be selected. A validation of the experts will also be done to determine relevance of the instruments and reliability of the questionnaire will be determined using Cronbach Alpha. Quantitative analysis will be performed based on descriptive and inferential statistics, and the qualitative data of the interviews and content analysis will be coded and thematically analyzed. The study will follow the ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.