

BITING THE TECHNOLOGICAL BAIT? TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The study was propelled by the zeal to establish the views of English language teachers on the linguistic capabilities of secondary school learners in Zimbabwe. Theoretically, the exploration was grounded in psychology focusing specifically on Bandura's social learning theory, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. The descriptive survey research design was employed with questionnaires and focus group discussions as data collection instruments. A purposively chosen sample of 25 English language secondary school classroom practitioners with a post-teacher training teaching experience of at least five years participated in the study. The study established that English language secondary school teachers rated the English language proficiency of the current cohort of secondary school learners as comparatively inferior to that of the learners in the preceding cohorts of at least one decade ago. The respondents attributed such a generational difference in English linguistic abilities to a myriad of factors. From the respondents' viewpoint, a multiplicity of variables such as lack of reading role models, the prevalence of various forms of entertainment ushered in by technological innovations and limited parental involvement can be incriminated for aggravating secondary school learners' linguistic prowess in Zimbabwe. It was recommended that stakeholders such as parents, guardians and teachers should deliberately foster the culture of reading and endeavour to avail a variety of materials which learners can regularly read so as to sharpen their linguistic proficiency. Recommendations were made to other researchers interested in language issues to replicate the current study with variations in geographical context or academic discipline.

Keywords: Adolescence, English language proficiency, technological innovations, parental involvement, cyberspace comfort and convenience.

INTRODUCTION

Language, whether verbal, written or in sign form, remains a fundamental determinant of the nature and quality of human interaction. In the education fraternity, the impartation of knowledge, skills or attitudes can only occur when it is mediated by language in one way or the other. Gravett & Geyser (2004:69) back this notion when they claim that in academic circles, language remains a crucial variable mainly because it is a medium of instruction which can paint a picture of reality. According to Goldstein (2008:389), Santrock (2004:56) and Feldman (2009:271) language is simply a medium or a form of communication which is used to transmit ideas through speech, signs or written symbols governed by certain rules. The realisation of the utility of English language proficiency in the diverse facets of human functioning acted as an impetus for embarking on the current study. The main thrust of the

current study was to establish the extent to which the English language proficiency of adolescent secondary school learners has changed over the past three or four decades in Zimbabwe.

CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Nkosana (2009) posits that in most countries in southern Africa which entail Botswana, Zambia and Kenya, English language is dominantly used despite not being the mother language of the majority of the citizens in these countries. Just like in many countries in Africa, such as Botswana, Nigeria, Zambia and South Africa, English language has unquestionable linguistic supremacy in Zimbabwe as the prime official language and would therefore give advantage to those who are proficient in it with regard to participation in the public, economic and political domains of the country (Nkosana, 2009:15). In Zimbabwean secondary schools, English Language is dominantly used as the medium of instruction in most academic disciplines despite not being the mother tongue for the majority of the learners (Kufakunesu, 2015).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to scrutinise the relationship between English language proficiency and scholastic achievement in a number of academic disciplines. For instance, Mosqueda and Tellez (2008:416) the English language proficiency of non-English speakers is very important in predicting the learners' achievement performance in Mathematics. Barton and Barton (2003:19) also empirically found out that learners with linguistic challenges in English language tend to have poor academic attainment in Mathematics particularly in bilingual and multilingual settings. An allied study conducted by Prins and Ulijn (1998:139-159) involving adolescent respondents confirmed that cultural and linguistic variables in the ordinary language mediated learners' academic attainment in Mathematics. However, these studies did not make an endeavour to compare the English language proficiency of secondary school learners of different cohorts. The current study attempts to close that gap and is not inclined towards to exploring learners' Mathematics achievement.

A number of authorities emphasise the importance of linguistic abilities in general and English language proficiency in particular. Meltzer and Hamann (2005:2) together with Kamil (2003) and Snow and Biancarosa (2003) maintain that educational researchers and policymakers are now sensitive to the increasing need to attend to adolescent literacy development in a bid to enhance secondary school learners' probability of demonstrating content-area mastery across the curriculum. Nippold (2007) maintains that adolescents with speech, language and communication difficulties are often inundated with poor academic achievement, social and emotional challenges and poor peer relationships. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) and Black (2009), a significant proportion of studies exploring workforce readiness revealed that employers still value written and oral communication skills more highly than simple proficiency in information technology. In support of this, Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002:29) remark, "The academic success that culturally and linguistically diverse students will experience in school hinges more on how these learners are able to manipulate language in a variety of contexts and purposes than on the specific language they use". More precisely, Nippold (2007) maintains that English language proficiency to some extent determines the extent to which both adolescent and pre-adolescent learners are able to exhaust their scholastic and social potentials. In an allied remark, Callahan (2005:323) indicates that it is always vital to expose English Language learners who are not native English speakers to learn domain-specific language academic English which is used in a variety of sectors such as the scientific world, the legal fraternity and the business sector so as to enhance their academic achievement. This implies that there

remains the need to explore the English language proficiency of secondary school learners to cater for their immediate and future development needs.

The English language proficiency of adolescent secondary learners can be mediated by the frequency and quality of parental involvement. There is sufficient research evidence to back the claim that a positive correlation exists between parental involvement and their children's academic attainment. Parents who employ the authoritative parenting style are likely to enhance the linguistic abilities of their children (Kufakunesu et al, 2013:830; Lahey, 2009). In support of this, Chang (2007:27) claims that empirical research results show that there is a strong positive correlation between authoritative parenting and the ratings of perceived parents' satisfaction in academics, social, and personal areas of their adolescent children's lives. Studies by Perry (2000) and the American Psychological Association (2002:23) established that a strong sense of bonding, closeness, and attachment to family normally triggers better emotional development and better academic performance regardless of the nature of the family to which the adolescent belongs. Some of the linguistic challenges of adolescent learners can be attributed to poor or lack of parental involvement. Settersten (2005) and Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) regret that some adolescents come from families in which parents are unavailable, unable, or, in some cases, reluctant to give the support to their adolescent children as an outcome of variables like parental divorce, poverty, unemployment, hectic lifestyles, death, or psychological estrangement of parents and their children. It was deemed crucial by the researchers to examine if the English language ability of secondary schools learners mutated over time as a result of variations in parental involvement.

Classroom practitioners arguably remain a critical variable in the teaching and learning matrix. Just like parents, teachers remain inevitable role models in the lives of adolescent learners. Herrero et al (2006:674) allude to the idea that teachers as professional adults are very important in assisting the adolescents to deal with a variety of challenges they encounter at school. To emphasise the importance of the knowledge of adolescent learners' linguistic abilities on the classroom practitioners, Ball and Farr (2003), Lee (2004) and Meltzer and Hamann (2004) concur that knowledge of their learners' strengths, areas of challenge, and socio-cultural backgrounds coupled with their understandings about literacy, can seriously influence the quality of their teaching. Meltzer and Hamann (2005) reiterate that secondary school classroom practitioners should concentrate on preparing adolescent learners to become independent learners, who can use reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking skills to successfully negotiate their roles as future employees, family members, and democratic citizens. On the contrary, Wong and Snow (2000:3) lament, "Too few teachers share or know about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English". It was against such a background that the current researchers embarked on the current study in which teachers were the only informants.

It is important to emphasise that secondary school learners are a unique by virtue of being in the process of changing from childhood to adulthood. The way secondary school learners behave is impinged upon by a myriad of variables. During adolescence, physical and cognitive maturation experienced as a result of hormonal changes trigger alterations in the emotional and social roles of the individual (Feldman, 2009:423; Ozmete and Bayo-Lu, 2009:313). The quest for an identity causes the adolescents to drift from their parents and habitually mingle with their peers (Steinberg and Morris, 2001:93; Erikson, 1968). Although adolescence is likely to trigger similar behavioural and emotional consequences in all cultures, different generations of adolescents may differ in one way or the other as a result of the permutations of the economic, political and technological contexts in which they find themselves.

On the basis of what the current researchers experienced and witnessed, there seems to be changes in the variables which mediate the English language proficiency of adolescent learners. Before 1995, the culture of reading was very prevalent in Zimbabwe. People used to read novels in both English language and the Zimbabwean native languages such as *Chi Shona* and *IsiNdebele*. It was common to find a variety of novels in different languages in bookshops in the country. Reading novels was sometimes done as a form of entertainment because by then, electronic entertainment was scarce and rudimentary. It was through such studious reading that the readers would enrich their vocabulary together with their grammatical, idiomatic, proverbial and spellings acumen in English language. During such a time, school libraries used to have a diversity of novels which learners would either read at school or borrow to read at home. Such a phenomenon produced one generation of learners with particular linguistic abilities particularly in English language.

The advent of technological innovations has somehow altered the lifestyles of adolescence in particular and everyone in general. Goldin (2008) and Monroe (2008) warn that technological transformations can negatively impinge learners' scholastic achievement. Kufakunesu et al (2011) established that internet facilities, sophisticated mobile telephones, video games and movies, among other things, have all been implicated for stealing learners' study time. One is left wondering if accessing the various technological innovations currently available does not compromise one's ability to engage in the meditative reading of novels and allied English literature. Black (2009:696) admits that adolescents' online technological escapades are dominantly leisure-time pursuits which contribute minimally to their academic efforts. While admitting that the internet has brought about great convenience in virtually all facets of human existence including education, Subong (2008) hastened to warn that the internet unfortunately exposes adolescent minds to emotionally absorbing materials which to some extent steal their study time. Black (2009:688) observes that as technological advancement and global social and economic interaction become increasingly rampant, it is logical that there also may be an equivalent shift in the kind of skills and abilities that individuals will need for them to effectively function in the modern work, leisure and academic contexts. Moreover, Black (2009) recommends that technological innovations should be utilised to enhance the English language proficiency of adolescent learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study was theoretically situated in the field of Psychology of Education principally because it is in the discipline of psychology that efforts have been made to link language and cognitive functioning (Kufakunesu, 2015). Emphasis was placed on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bandura's social learning theory, Piaget's theory of cognitive development and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory places emphasis on the principle of observational learning, among other things. Through his experiments with Bobo dolls, Bandura established that learning can occur in the presence or absence of reinforcement (Kufakunesu and Dekeza, 2017). Observational learning, which is also called imitation or modelling, is a type of learning which occurs when an individual observes and subsequently imitates the another person's behaviour (Kufakunesu, 2015; Santrock, 2004:227). According to Feldman (2009:201) there are researches which established that human beings are genetically pre-programmed to imitate other people. This implies that adolescents can imitate the way significant others such as teachers, parents, actors, musicians and school mates articulate themselves linguistically.

Piaget's Formal Operational Stage

Piaget advanced a stage cognitive theory in which individuals progress from the sensory-motor stage, the pre-operational stage, the concrete operational stage to the formal operational stage (Mwamwenda, 2004:89; Bruce, 2006:98). It is expected that the inception of the formal operational stage coincides with adolescence. According to William-Boyd (2003:67) it is during the formal operational stage that the individual gains the ability to engage in deductive reasoning and manipulating abstract concepts. Gazzaniga and Heatherton (2006:448) posit that formal operations entail abstract thinking which is characterised by the ability to formulate a hypothesis about a situation and subsequently test it through deductive logic. Stickle (2010:18), maintains that adolescents can engage in verbal reasoning by virtue of being in possession of a large vocabulary. In the current study, the linguistic abilities of adolescents who were expected to have a full array of the English language vocabulary were examined.

Vygotsky's Views on Language

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian 20th century psychologist, attempted to clarify the relationship between language and cognition. Vygotsky claimed that although language and thought initially develop as separate entities, they later merge (Santrock, 2004:52; Kufakunesu, 2015). Bhatt (2007:37) clarifies that Vygotsky postulated that language is a tool for thinking, that is, inner speech is verbal thinking and hence language is a vital tool for thinking. Concepts initially develop in the individual at the inter-mental level and subsequently become internalised at an intra-mental terrain. After mastering the ability to engage in self-talk, the individual uses language as internal thought for regulating behavioural and cognitive processes (Kufakunesu, 2015). According to Bhatt (2006:37) an individual's private speech is thought that the individual uses to communicate with herself or himself for purposes of self-guidance, self-direction and problem-solving. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory suggests that linguistic fluency is to some extent related to mental sharpness and consequently, the extent to which learners are proficient in the language used as the medium of instruction can determine their academic attainment.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which was named after its proponents and is also called Whorfianism, claims that the way people think hinges on the nature of the language they speak in their culture (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008:241; Nisbett & Norenzayan, 2004:6). According to Kufakunesu (2015), the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has two versions, which are linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity. The radical view by anthropologist Edward Sapir that language determines thought has been labelled linguistic determinism while linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf's opinion that language affects thought has been taken as the weaker version of the hypothesis called linguistic relativity (Goldstein, 2008:387). Nisbett and Norenzayan (2004:6) and Park (2000:19) posit that numerous empirical investigations have established more evidence in support of linguistic relativity than linguistic determinism. Whether taken in its radical or weaker form, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has pedagogical and andragogic implications which are difficult to ignore. It was through making such considerations that the current researchers decided to embark on a study to explore the trend of secondary school learners' English language proficiency in Zimbabwe.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was an endeavour to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers rate the English linguistic abilities of the current cohort of secondary school learners relative to those of the previous cohorts?
2. Which variables account for homogeneity or heterogeneity in English language proficiency among secondary school learners over different generations?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the current study was qualitative in nature. The descriptive survey research design was used after considering its suitability in exploring the views of English language classroom practitioners (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003). Kufakunesu et al (2013:832) and Sidhu (2001) define a descriptive survey as a research design which attempts to describe and interpret the existing phenomena in the form of processes, effects, attitudes and beliefs. Focus group discussions and questionnaires with open-ended items were employed as data collecting instruments. A focus group discussion according to Kufakunesu and Dekeza (2017:54) is a variation of interviews undertaken in small and manageable groups which explore a specific issue chosen by a researcher who acts as a facilitator. According to Swartz et al (2011:29) a questionnaire is a document containing methodically and meticulously structured items prepared by the researchers to solicit responses from the research informants during data collection.

A sample of 25 practising teachers trained to teach English language at secondary school level with a minimum teaching experience of 15 years was selected using the purposive sampling method. According to Kufakunesu et al (2013:1560) and Chiromo (2006:18) purposive sampling, which is also called judgemental sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher employs his or her discretion to choose research participants on the basis of their suitability and typicality. The selected research informants had a mean age of 43.87 years with a standard deviation of 12.305 years.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following are the findings which emerged from the empirical investigation:

1. All the 25 respondents concurred that the English language proficiency of secondary school learners has mutated over the past few decades. However, they gave varied opinions regarding the nature and causes of such linguistic variability.
2. The culture of cyberspace comfort, speed and convenience which globalisation and technological advancement introduced somehow eroded the culture of hardworking and meditative studying among the current cohort of adolescent secondary school learners.
3. Erratic or limited parental involvement was singled out as a credible cause of the degeneration of linguistic abilities on the part of the current cohort of secondary school learners.
4. Technological innovations were blamed for acting as a counter-attraction which robs the current group of adolescent learners of their precious time to meditate on the various types of English language literature.
5. Teaching and studying only for examination purposes were identified as other variables promoting poor English language proficiency on the part of the learners.

DISCUSSION

The secondary school English language classroom practitioners who took part in the study unanimously concurred that the passage of time has resulted in noticeable linguistic differences among secondary school learners of different cohorts. More precisely, they rated the English language skills of the secondary school learners in the current cohort as generally inferior to those of their predecessors relative to a number of dimensions. During focus group discussions, the researchers managed to gather that English language learners who did their secondary education in the first two decades after 1980 were rated to be very strong when it comes to grammatical issues such as punctuation, spellings, comprehensions and giving meanings of words. It was also established that such learners were good at writing original and culturally relevant compositions with no intention to give renditions of movies as is currently occurring. However, the respondents remarked that the current generation of secondary school learners is better than its predecessors in public speaking particularly due the markedly high levels of confidence which they exude. This can be attributed to the many English language role models, as postulated by Bandura's social learning theory, whom they watch on television and other currently prevalent forms of electronic media which were relatively scarce at least two decades ago. If the views of the research participants are anything to go by, then it implies that the academic attainment of the current cohort of learners in other learning disciplines has also degenerated. This is so because Mosqueda and Tellez (2008:416) and Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002:29) report that there is a positive correlation between learners' English language proficiency and their scholastic attainment in other areas.

The responses to questionnaires also confirmed that English language classroom practitioners generally lamented current secondary school learners' intellectual frailty when it comes to giving the meanings of relatively large words. The presence of electronic forms of English language dictionaries was cited as a variable which discourages the current group of secondary school learners from wanting to memorise meanings of words. Nevertheless, eight respondents indicated that there was a proportion of learners in the current cohort who still devote time to study English semantics on their own in both rural and urban settings. One English language secondary school teacher, who started teaching the subject in 1994, gave the following explanation during one focus group discussion:

I have noticed that the current cohort of secondary schools learners struggle to give meanings of words such as vigorous, voracious, gigantic and tremendous, yet their counterparts we taught before the year 2000 were very comfortable with such words. The issue is that learners in the previous decades took pride in mastering the meanings of words while the current cohort of learners habitually resort to the use of dictionaries to check the meanings of words and forget about the meanings of such words thereafter without deliberately trying to memorise them.

Given the above views, it therefore stands to reason to deduce on the basis of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that the thinking skills of the current cohort of secondary school learners may be compromised by their linguistic limitations. Such a conclusion is premised on the claim by Vygotsky that language affects thinking. Moreover, Nippold (2007)'s claim that adolescents with speech, language and communication difficulties often encounter poor academic achievement, social and emotional challenges and poor peer relationships may be a cause for concern regarding the current cohort of secondary school learners.

According to the respondents of the current study, one credible explanation for the deteriorating linguistic abilities on the part of the current cohort of secondary school learners was limited or absolute lack of parental involvement. This was in agreement with the views

of Perry (2000) and the American Psychological Association (2002:23) who emphasise that parental involvement can foster sound academic performance in virtually all academic disciplines. Nineteen out of the 25 secondary school teachers opined that the hectic lifestyles of many parents especially in urban areas as they try to earn money to look after their families somehow render them too busy to make meaningful contributions in the scholastic welfare of their children. These sentiments tallied with the views of Settersten (2005) and Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) who opined that nowadays there are adolescents who hail from families where parents are unavailable, unable, or, in some cases, unwilling to provide them with support as a result of variables such as parental divorce, poverty, unemployment, hectic lifestyles, death, or psychological estrangement of parents and their children. The research informants believed that nowadays secondary school learners rarely receive assistance from their parents or guardians in dealing with their scholastic work. Such a phenomenon normally leaves learners with an option to relax or not to exhaust their academic abilities since the parents seem unconcerned in their children's academic progress.

Adolescents, by virtue of being in the process of changing from childhood to adulthood, should not be denied adult guidance because they may misuse their abstract thinking skills to engage in dangerous experimental behaviour (Gazzaniga and Heatherton, 2006; William-Boyd, 2003). Limited parental involvement was regarded as worse in cases where working single parents were involved. Moreover, parents were also blamed for not reading English language materials such as novel in the home for their children to develop an interest in reading. Fourteen respondents confirmed that in the first one and half decades after 1980, many literate parents used to buy novels and they would read them in the presence of their children, thereby fostering a reading culture. Nowadays it is rare to find English novels in many homes.

In an attempt to justify the existence of differences in the English language abilities of learners in the current and previous generational cohorts, 23 out of the 25 respondents, that is, 92% simply pointed out that since culture is dynamic, academic issues in any culture tend to undergo metamorphosis in one way or the other. They indicated that the advent of cyberspace has ushered in a culture of comfort, speed and convenience in literally all spheres of life and academic issues cannot be an exception. Consequently, globalisation and technological innovations have to some extent eroded the culture of exerting massive effort to achieve a given goal. Therefore, hardworking and meditative studying which used to characterise the lifestyles of learners at least three decades ago have ceased to be virtues among the current crop of secondary schools learners. The prevalence of solutions to many real life problems on the internet was implicated by the research respondents for tempting secondary school learners to despise thoroughness and rigorous exertion of effort in many undertakings including the study of English language. Moreover, the informants regretted that the available technological applications were acting as a decoy which robs the current cohort of adolescent learners of their vital time to concentrate on the various types of English language literature (Goldin, 2008; Monroe, 2008; Kufakunesu et al, 2011). The findings of the current study tallied with the assertion by Subong (2008) and Black (2009:696) that the internet unfortunately exposes adolescent minds to emotionally absorbing materials which arguably steals their study time.

Closely linked to this was the aspect of corruption which is gradually corroding the moral uprightness of many societies. The respondents argued that corrupt activities in society defeat the need to be diligent so as to attain your goals on the basis of merit. A combination of these technological and socio-cultural factors was rated as a plausible explanation for the variability in Learners' English language proficiency over different generations in Zimbabwe. As connoted in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the new cultural practices seem to be taking their

toll on the linguistic skills of the current cohort of secondary school learners (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008:241; Nisbett & Norenzayan, 2004:6).

Seventeen out of the 25 research participants lamented the demise of reading as a pastime in recent years. They indicated that at least 15 years ago, reading was a prevalent hobby in Zimbabwe and that was significantly propitious to the nurturing of good English language skills among learners and adults. The informants reported that secondary school learners used to engage in liberal reading which was not confined to examination set books. These sentiments were consistent with what the researchers experienced during their adolescence more than two decades ago. Unfortunately, the whole terrain has changed and learners are practically syllabus bound, that is, they only want to read content which they think is linked to what they will find in the examinations. As far as the English language teachers were concerned, studying only for examination purposes was a barrier to sound language development, yet English language proficiency is required beyond the examination setup. The respondents even blamed some classroom practitioners who seem not to be passionate about assisting learners to improve when it comes to English language proficiency as indicated by Wong and Snow (2000:3). The situation prevailing on the ground confirmed the neglect of the views of Meltzer and Hamann (2005), Ball and Farr (2003), Lee (2004) and Meltzer and Hamann (2004) who recommended teachers should be aware of that their learners' linguistic strengths, areas of challenge, and socio-cultural backgrounds coupled with their understandings about literacy so as know how best to assist them.

Another allied variable which was blamed for fuelling the degeneration of secondary school learners' English language proficiency was bleak employment prospects. The respondents commented that in the previous decades, learners used to value linguistic skills in English language particularly for future use in job interviews. This is in agreement with the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) and Black (2009) who indicate that a number of researches on workforce readiness established that employers value written and oral communication skills more highly than simple proficiency in information technology. Regrettably, the fact that the employment setup has changed resulting in many people engaging in informal trade is an obvious blow in the face of the efforts meant to groom learners to excel in formal employment settings. Moreover, some adolescent secondary school learners of the current cohort have numerous examples of highly educated people who are not formally employed.

CONCLUSION

The quest to find out if there are any variations in the English language proficiency of secondary school learners over the past few decades from the point of view of classroom practitioners' resulted in the confirmation of the existence of significant linguistic mutations. As far as the English language teachers who took part in the study were concerned, the English language skills of the current cohort of adolescent secondary school learners is inferior to that of learners in the previous cohorts when crucial aspects such as spellings, originality, punctuation are concerned. The research informants attributed the differences in English language proficiency on the part of secondary school learners to globalisation, technological advancement, reduced parental involvement and the general erosion of the culture of reading. They claimed that the current cohort of secondary school learners is biting the technological decoy resulting in them not having ample time to read English language literature. They felt that all educational stakeholders should devise ways of harnessing the technological resources available to enhance the English language proficiency of learners which has deteriorated principally due to the ripple effects of globalisation and technological advancement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Classroom practitioners at all tiers of the education system should encourage learners to engage in wide reading so as to enrich their English language proficiency.
2. Teachers should familiarise learners with the various ways through which they can read English language textbooks and allied literature which are found on the internet. Learners need to be taught to realise that the internet can be beneficially used to source various reading materials which they can digest o enhance their linguistic skills.
3. Parents should encourage their children to read English language literature and avail the required materials both in print and electronic forms. Where possible, parents should exemplify good reading habits in a bid to be role models for their children.
4. Secondary school learners should exercise discipline when it comes to the use of various technological innovations at their disposal. Instead of downloading applications for entertainment purposes only, they should also focus on academic materials such as soft copies of English language dictionaries and guidelines on how to write compositions.
5. Both parents and teachers should highlight the utility of English language proficiency to secondary school learners particularly as a necessary determinant of their prosperity during tertiary training and in the world of work.
6. Other researchers are urged to replicate the current study in Zimbabwe or anywhere in the world especially using quantitative methods in which t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) are employed.
7. Interested researchers are encouraged to repeat the current study with variations in the academic disciplines being considered. It is also possible to compare the language proficiency of secondary school learners of different cohorts in native Zimbabwean languages such as *Chi Shona* and *IsiNdebele*.

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