Notes

Introduction

Research on education in South Africa. The quality of data gathered during apartheid has been questioned.

The first post-apartheid census took place in Durban in 1996, but has not been published at the time of writing.

This joint research project is to collect initial data on language use at home and in school.

With the goal to **raise awareness** of:

- Teachers
- School boards
- Educational authorities

On **multilingual issues** and to create policy for language learning.

There was a survey in Noord-Brabant (1995), which was used as a model.

Method

The area was divided into 9 school districts. Historically, the children were segregated based on race.

Due to political sensitivity, it was not possible to include to include a question on race in the questionnaire to ensure the sample represents the population.

Questionnaires were administered by teachers, who received a training session. The grade 1 students were questioned by the teachers in a quiet space. The grade 7 students filled in the questionnaire in class, with teachers available for help.

A total of 6753 children completed the survey.

Many children didn't know their country of birth. Even more didn't know their parents'.

Results: First outcomes

Home languages

- A broad spectrum of home language are spoken in the sample. 22 languages are mentioned more than once.
    - Grade 1 teachers face students from many different linguistic backgrounds
- 6 lanugages stand out:
    1. English
    2. Zulu
    3. Afrikaans
    4. Xhosa
    5. Tamil
    6. Hindi

- The other 11 popular languages are from Africa, Asia and Europe.

School languages

- 18 languages were chosen by children as preferred in school more than once.
- 8 languages were chosen by teachers as preferred in school more than once.
- There are strong indications that children prefer to speak one of their 3 home languages in school.
- Educational authorities are moving towards making English the standard language in education.

Language preference (like to learn)

- 47% of the children would like to learn English
- A surprising 22% of the children would like to learn Afrikaans (in spite of not having a high profile).
- 38% of the children would like to learn Zulu or another African language.
- 31% of the children would like to learn French or another European language.
- The actual offering consists of only 13 languages (reported more than once).
- It is unclear whether children interpreted the question as languages they want to learn including languages they're currently learning in school or not.

Results: Languages in competition

- 53.5% of the homes where English is the first language are monolingual.
- Only 23.4% of Afrikaans and 26.7% of Zulu first language homes are monolingual.
- Many pupils come from bi/multilingual homes
- Children who report to speak Zulu, English and Afrikaans at home are worse at Afrikaans.
    - This may be because Zulu is spoken by Black people and in their segregated schools, their black teachers whose spoken language proficiency was limited.
- The children's proficiency corresponds with their preference with regards to Zulu-first preferences for speaking Afrikaans.

Conclusions and discussion

The conclusions have a preliminary status, because there are gaps in the data, such as:

- There may be an underrepresentation of black students.
- The reported behavioral data must be supported with observed behavioural data.
- The sample distribution across districts must be enlarged
- The multitude of languages children learn at home will come as a surprise to educational planners.
- The desire to be instructed in the first home language should be noted by all involved in education in the region.
- The desire to learn other languages should be noted by all involved in education in the region.

- The indications of possible language shift should be explored

Reading questions

1. Formulate the issue

a) Although not explicity stated in the paper, the main research question is "what languages do primary school children in the Durban area speak at home and in school?"

b) The research goal is to raise awareness of multilingual issues with teachers, school boards, and educational authorities, and to create corresponding policy for language learning.

2. Formulate the most important conclusions

- There are strong indications that children prefer to speak one of their 3 home languages in school.
- In total, the languages the children learn at home are more diverse than educational planners expect.
- The desire of the children to be instructed in their first home language should be noted by all involved in education in the region.
- The desire of the children to learn other languages should be noted by all involved in education in the region.

3. Oral versus reading/writing proficiency in Afrikaans

The proficiency is self-reported by the children, based on the closed questions:

- "Can you understand Afrikaans?"
- "Can you speak Afrikaans?"
- "Can you read Afrikaans?"
- "Can you write Afrikaans?"

From a total of 375 children who speak English as a first language and Afrikaans as a second language at home:

- 83% report they can understand Afrikaans.
- 78% report they can speak Afrikaans.
- 69% report they can read Afrikaans.
- 68% report they can write Afrikaans.

Hence, the reason the authors conclude that oral proficiency in Afrikaans (as second language) is lower than reading and writing proficiency, is that children self-report slightly more frequently that they are proficient.

4. Evaluating the conclusion validity

a) The authors assume a relationship exists between ethnicity and Afrikaans spoken language proficiency.

b) Ethnicity can be considered an independent variable and Afrikaans spoken language proficiency can be considered a dependent variable.

c) The level of measurement of these variables is:

- Ethinicty: Identity
- Afrikaans spoken proficiency: Magnitude

d) Considering only the descriptive statistics, do you think the results support the conclusion that there is a relation between the variables? Explain.

5. Evaluating the face validity

a) Language proficiency was operationalized as an introspective assessment of the children's ability to speak, understand, read and write a language.

b) A behavioural self-report measure.

c) This type of measure relies on the individual's ability to accurately describe their own behaviour. The veracity of the reports and the individual's memory must be taken into account.

d) I don't think that self-reported values are reliable here, as I believe the results will be hard to reproduce. The administering of the survey took place in various circumstances and was carried out by various school teachers with minimal training. Furthermore, the older children were asked to fill out the survey's in class, where the children could affect their peer's results. Finally, children will generally have a harder time to accurately self-assess as it involves self-awareness, which people develop over years.

e) They provided training to all teachers and standardized the context in which the survey was administered across schools.

f) I don't think that language proficiency has been operationalized satisfactorily. I would have liked to have seen some correlation between children's self-assessment and empirical assessments of children's language proficiency to support the claim that children who say they can read/write/speak/understand a language actually can.

g) A standardized language test with exercises targeting all four linguistic modalities.

6. Evaluating the internal validity

a) The students in grade 1 are orally questioned by a teacher, alone in a separate room. The students in grade 7 are given a written survey to fill in, in class with their peers, having a teacher in the room to provide help.

b) I think that the difference in interview procedure can cause many differences. Perhaps the grade 1 students who are interviewed by their teacher give certain answers in attempt to please their teachers. Or perhaps the grade 7 students discuss their answers out loud and influence their peers.

c) Causality requires directionality and when solely examining existing data, you can't establish directionality.

d) The answers from grades higher than grade 1 could be closer to those of grade 7. This would cause the measure of central tendency to move up. The same could apply to grade 7 students mixed with lower grade students.

e) I don't believe the conclusion about the language shift to be internally valid as the assumption that there is a causal relationship isn't justified.

7. Evaluating the external validity

a) The target population of the conclusion are primary school children in the greater Durban metropolitan area.

b) The operational population were grade 1 and grade 7 students from all schools in the greater Durban metropolitan area.

c) The sample consists of 6753 children, most of them being grade 1 and grade 7 students, and some being grade 3/4 and 5/6 students as teachers were instructed to supplement grade 1 and 7 classes under 75 students with them. The Durban area consists of 9 districts, 4 were included in the sample. 2 of those districs had predominantly white schools, 1 Indian and 1 black. The gender distribution of students is fairly even. The ethnic distribution is undetermined as at the time this was a senstivive topic to include in a survey. 98.3% Of the children in the sample who knew their place of birth reported being born in South Africa.

d) The sampling technique is called cluster sampling, with the school districts forming clusters. It seems neither random nor stratified random.

e) In the general population, 5 out of 9 school districts have predominantly black schools. Only 2 districts are predominantly white and another 2 districts are predominantly Indian. In the sample, all 2 predominantly white school districts are included while, and 1 out of the 2 predominantly Indian school districts is included, while only 1 out of 5 predominantly black school districts is included. Hence, there's a large misrepresentation of ethnicity in the sample.

f) I think the results of the study can't be generalized to the general population as the sample doesn't accurately represent the ethnicity of the general population. Given the historical importance the authors place on the students' ethnicity, the sample results don't apply to the general population.