

Challenges in Developing Teaching Materials for Specific Purposes in the Yoruba Language

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges in developing Yoruba language for specific purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. Developing authentic materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language in various fields/professions such as engineering, healthcare, tourism, aviation, etc., is crucial to increasing and sustaining students' motivation in learning the Yorùbá language. Previous studies in the Yoruba language mainly focused on creating terminologies in some fields like medicine, engineering physics, legislative proceedings, building construction, etc. Despite these works, attention is not given to a comprehensive study of creating materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. Employing a qualitative approach, this study collected data through interviews with material developers and language educators, observations of existing language teaching practices, and a critical review of available Yoruba language resources. Findings reveal that inadequate research, non-availability of materials, needs in the context of use, colonialism, and lack of sufficient teachers in language fields are the problems currently facing material development in the Yoruba language for specific purposes. Proposed solution includes conducting needs analysis, developing curriculum that meets specific needs of the students, and amendments of government policies on indigenous languages. The pedagogical implication is that robust YLSP material development can significantly boost student enrollment and motivation, thereby enhancing the value and status of the Yoruba language in education and beyond.

Keywords: Yoruba language, Specific Purposes, Material development, Motivation, Need Analysis

Introduction

Developing materials in the Yoruba language for specific purposes is essential in learning Yoruba as a second language because it will promote the value of the language. This may seem new to the Yoruba learning circle, but it is important to develop materials for specific purposes to stimulate students' interest in acquiring the Yoruba language. This will also

sustain their motivation. Just as English for Specific Purposes developed after World War II and emerged as a language of power because of its functions (Starfield, 2016:151), we can also have a field for teaching the Yoruba language for specific purposes. This will increase the value of the Yoruba language and make the language prestigious.

The missionaries contributed to an aspect of the emergence of Yoruba for specific purposes when an attempt was made to put the Yoruba language into writing. They produced religious materials in journals and daily/bi-weekly newspapers because they were looking for a way to spread the gospel. Henry Townsend who is an English clergyman (Johnson, 1921: xxiii) made the first attempt to reduce the Yoruba language writing by creating the Yorùbá alphabet. Afterward, he began to write poems about the gospel in a Yoruba News paper called Akede Eko. We also have various scholars that have worked on Yoruba grammar, literature, and culture but there is no robust work on specific areas of study that can motivate more students to learn and acquire the language for professional fields. The most common concept in the available Yoruba textbooks that I classified under tourism is the greetings, shopping, and daily interaction with friends and family. I observed that there are no materials in specific fields on the Yoruba language except for the scripture that we have for Christian and traditional religion in the Yoruba language. In this study, I will address this issue by analyzing the interviews that I had with the participants.

Literature Review

Existing works on specific areas in material development have focused on creating materials on terminologies in some specific fields like engineering, legislative terms, medicine, etc. We also have several scholars that have worked on Yoruba dictionaries and religious books. Such scholars include Delana (1958), Abraham (1958), Yai (1996), and Fakindele (2003). We also have the encyclopedia of the Yoruba by Falola and Akinyemi (2016) and a dictionary of the Yoruba language by the Church Missionary Society (2012).

The works mentioned so far have focused on the translation and meaning of English words into the Yoruba language. Another related work is Yoruba Metalanguage I and II by Bamgbose (1984) and Awobuluyi (1990) which is a glossary of English-Yoruba technical terms in language, and literature. Books that serve for teaching Yoruba traditional religion include Abimbola (1969), Babalola and Jeje (1969), Samadhi (1993). Olupona (2017) works on developing Yoruba terminologies for diseases. His work is an attempt to create terms for some diseases in the Yoruba language Furthermore, materials that are commonly used for teaching Yoruba second language learners are always filled with basic concepts like greetings, expressions, grammar, names of professions, Yoruba vocabularies etc. The scholars that have worked on that are Schleicher (1993 and 1998), Crowther (2011), Adeleke (2011), Mosadomi (2014), McClure, and Oyewale (2016).

To explore more data on the challenges that are facing the development of materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language, I have been observing the kind of materials that are being used to teach the Yoruba language both online and in person.

These materials are largely books from scholars like Odunjo (1949), Awobuluyi (1978), Bamgbose (1990), and some other books that have been in existence for a long period. The new dispensation of books that are employed in teaching the Yoruba language to second language learners in this era includes online language books like *Yorùbá Yé mi* (Mosadomi, 2014) and other free online language resources.

In addition, we have the book called *Jé k'á sọ Yorùbá*, and *Jé k'á ka Yorùbá*, by Schleicher (1993 & 1998). These books focus on developing speaking, reading, and writing competence. For listening, the African language resource center at Indiana University has some open materials that can be used by Yoruba second language learners¹. I also observed that the materials have almost the same content, and most materials focused on concepts like greetings, shopping, and some basic grammar.

Current Study

This study investigates the challenges inherent in developing Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. By employing a qualitative methodology involving interviews, observations, and a review of existing Yoruba language resources, this research aims to:

1. Identify the challenges facing the development of materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language.
2. Propose strategies to foster and encourage the creation of such materials for the Yoruba language.

Methodology

Data Collection

A qualitative approach was employed with emphasis on data collection through interviews, observation, and review of existing materials on the Yoruba language. To collect the data, a questionnaire with 8 questions were developed to obtain Yorùbá language teachers and material developers experiences to examine the problems that are facing materials development for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. The participants are three Yoruba teachers and materials/resources developers from different Universities in the United States.

The interview was conducted virtually via Zoom with 1 participant, and via email with the other 2 participants. The virtual interview was conducted with the participant that works at an African language resource center at a University in the United States, and it took about an hour because of some follow-up questions. Informed consent was given by the participant to record during the interview. The other participants answered the questions in a Word document, and they sent it via email.

Existing Materials

Existing works in the Yoruba language were also examined to explore the problems facing the development of materials for teaching the Yoruba language in specific areas. As I pointed out in section 1.1, we have some materials that are being used in teaching the Yoruba second language learners. Apart from Yorùbá Yé mi, Jẹ́ ká sọ Yorùbá, Jẹ́ ká ka Yorùbá, and Jẹ́ ká kọ Yorùbá, we have a lot of materials (soft and hard materials) that are used in teaching the Yoruba language. We also have materials that are used via technology-assisted learning platforms like mobile phones, computers, and applications like YouTube. Despite the extensive materials that are available for teaching and learning the Yoruba language, there are limited textbooks for specific purposes in the Yoruba language. The only areas where we have some materials for specific purposes in the Yoruba language are the social/communicative aspect and the religious aspect (Christianity and the Yorùbá Traditional Religion).

Results: Challenges in Developing Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes Materials

This section addresses the first research question by detailing the key challenges hindering the development of YLSP materials, as revealed through interviews with Yoruba language educators and material developers, supplemented by a review of existing literature.

Inadequate Specialized Research

A primary barrier to YLSP material development is the scarcity of targeted pedagogical research. As Participant A cogently articulated:

“There is a severe lack of specialized research in developing specific purpose materials for Yoruba language, particularly for fields like business, aviation, or law. Most existing studies stop at just listing terminologies.”

This observation is echoed in the literature, where much of the scholarly effort related to specific domains in Yoruba has historically focused on creating metalanguage and specialized dictionaries rather than comprehensive teaching materials. For instance, Olupona’s (2017) work on disease terminology and the “Metalanguage” series by Awobuluyi (1990) and Bamgbose (1984) are invaluable for lexical expansion. However, these resources, while foundational, do not translate directly into pedagogical materials that equip second language learners with the functional language skills needed for professional contexts. Current Yoruba textbooks for second language learners predominantly feature general communicative content—such as greetings, shopping, and daily interactions with virtually no materials dedicated to specific subject areas like engineering, law, aviation,

banking, or stock exchange.

Limited Availability and Accessibility of Existing Materials

The scarcity of materials extends beyond the lack of specialized research to the non-availability and accessibility of existing resources. Participant B lamented that, “There is limited availability of even general teaching materials.”

Citing the scarcity of useful textbooks like *Jẹ́ ká sọ Yorùbá*, *Jẹ́ ká ka Yorùbá*, and *Jẹ́ ká kọ Yorùbá*. She emphasized that these materials, though beneficial for their communicative activities and role-plays, are not in the market, which severely limits student access.

While these books are effective for developing basic communicative competence, they do not address specific professional or academic domains. This issue highlights a dual challenge: not only are comprehensive YLSP materials largely absent, but even valuable general resources struggle with distribution and accessibility, hindering teaching and learning processes.

Perceived Lack of Need in Context of Use

A significant challenge identified by participants is the perceived lack of contextual need for YLSP materials, both within Nigeria and in the diaspora. Participant C, who works at a language resource center, asserted that, “There are no efforts being made to create materials for specific purposes because there is simply no demand for teaching Yoruba in certain specialized fields.”

This perception stems from the current linguistic landscape where, for instance, the Nigerian banking industry predominantly conducts transactions in English. While bankers may code-mix or switch to Yoruba for customers who do not understand English, the overall communication is maintained through English, often facilitated by bilingual staff or interpreters. This socio-economic reality, heavily influenced by Nigeria’s colonial legacy, reduces the necessity for specific Yoruba banking materials. Similarly, in the diaspora, students’ immediate needs often revolve around general communication for family ties or cultural engagement, rather than professional application. The argument here is that the environment in Nigeria currently does not provide sufficient opportunities for professionals to extensively use Yoruba in specific subject areas, thus reducing the motivation for material developers to create them. This perspective, while reflecting current realities, underscores the complex interplay between language use, economic utility, and material development.

Impact of Colonialism and English Language Hegemony

Colonialism continues to exert a profound influence on the status and development of the Yoruba language, particularly concerning specific purpose materials. Nigeria’s adoption of English as its lingua franca post-colonization has led to the prioritization

of English language in official, professional, and educational domains. As Starfield (2016) notes, English's global power, often perceived as a "language of oppression and subjugation," has been reinforced by the political and economic influence of its native speakers (Ayeomoni, 2012). This societal prestige assigned to English often positions it as a measure of intelligence and a gateway to socio-economic advancement (Ayeomoni, 2012:15). Consequently, the Yoruba language is often relegated to a lower value status, diminishing the motivation for material developers and researchers to invest in creating specialized YLSP resources. The prevailing belief is that English is enough to achieving life aspirations, further strengthening its dominance.

Shortage of Passionate and Specially Trained Teachers/ Researchers

The development of YLSP materials is also hampered by a perceived shortage of teachers and researchers deeply committed to and specifically trained in Yoruba language for specific purposes. While Nigeria does produce trained Yoruba teachers (many with university degrees), a broader societal trend, often linked to the low value placed on indigenous languages, results in fewer individuals pursuing extensive Yoruba studies, especially beyond general communication. This can lead to situations where some schools, particularly at lower levels, may assign Yoruba teaching to unqualified personnel; qualified teachers may lack specific training in Language for Specific purpose pedagogy or material development for specialized domains, and research interests among Yoruba language scholars may not gravitate towards YLSP due to perceived lack of demand or institutional support. As Participant A candidly stated:

“Teachers who are not interested in the Yoruba language at heart can never think of using materials in specific fields or teaching specific subject areas to students. It is only teachers that have a passion for the Yoruba language that always have an interest in teaching Yoruba for specific purposes.”

This highlights that while general training exists, the specialized passion and expertise needed for YLSP innovation are less common, impacting both material creation and its integration into the curriculum.

Inadequate Government Policy Support

Government policies on indigenous languages constitute a significant barrier to YLSP material development. As Ayeomoni (2012:16) argues, institutional policies of government ministries, educational bodies, and media profoundly influence language functions. The Nigerian government's failure to consistently assign important roles to the Yoruba language across various sectors (e.g., law, business, media, engineering) directly impedes the motivation to develop specialized materials. Government publications

are predominantly in English. While some state governments, like Lagos and Oyo, nominally adopt Yoruba for legislative proceedings, this is often limited to specific days e.g., Lagos State House of Assembly uses Yoruba on Thursdays², while Oyo State uses it only on Wednesdays³, using English on other days. This sporadic and limited official use undermines the perceived utility of Yoruba in professional contexts, making the development of comprehensive YLSP materials seem less urgent or viable.

Strategies for Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) Material Development

Addressing the challenges outlined in the previous section requires several approaches involving various stakeholders. This section outlines key strategies to encourage and facilitate the development of YLSP materials.

Curriculum and Syllabus Development

A fundamental step is the development of robust and responsive curricula. As Tanner and Tanner (1980:25) define, curriculum encompasses “planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes,” while Mulenga (2018:3) describes it as the “program of education.” For this study, curriculum development refers to the comprehensive planning, organization, and implementation of course designs, lessons, and supporting materials. Purita, P et al (2008) affirm that most of the traditional ideas view curriculum as written documents or a plan of action in accomplishing goals.

The process of curriculum development for YLSP must be a collaborative effort involving researchers, Yoruba language teachers, and government/institutional education policymakers. Too often, particularly in developing countries, teachers are excluded from this vital process despite their frontline experience with student needs and their role in setting language course goals. Integrating their perspectives is essential for ensuring that the curriculum accurately reflects student needs and facilitates the inclusion of specific-purpose materials. The syllabus, as a direct articulation of the curriculum’s implementation, should then explicitly outline how YLSP content will be integrated, ensuring a clear path from broader educational intentions to specific classroom activities and material selection (Mulenga, 2018:3).

Comprehensive Needs Analysis

Central to effective YLSP material development is conducting thorough needs analyses. Authentic materials must be designed to directly address the specific communicative needs of learners. While acknowledging that YLSP cannot replicate the global utility of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)—which encompasses domains like English for medical, legal, scientific, or academic purposes due to English’s global dominance post-WWII (Starfield, 2016:150-151)—Yoruba language teachers and researchers must collaborate to identify the practical and aspirational needs of second

language learners.

For instance, students might learn Yoruba for relationship purposes, tourism, or religious engagement. A learner-centered approach dictates that materials should be tailored to these identified needs. To ascertain these diverse requirements, systematic surveys of second language learners can be conducted to classify their specific linguistic demands. This data can then inform the development of targeted materials and course syllabus.

Fostering Collaboration and Capacity Building

A collaborative effort among material developers, researchers, Yoruba teachers, and even professionals from various subject-matter fields is critical. This interdisciplinary approach can lead to a deeper understanding of specific domain requirements and the co-creation of relevant materials.

Furthermore, a key recommendation is to train instructors in YLSP material development. Beyond general language pedagogy, equipping teachers with the skills to design and adapt specific purpose materials empowers them to address emerging student needs directly. This capacity building is vital for pushing back against existing curriculum practices that do not adequately cater to specialized language use.

Institutional Support and Resource Development

Institutions offering Yoruba language instruction, both in Nigeria and abroad, have a crucial role to play in fostering YLSP material development. While some U.S. institutions like the University of Texas (Yoruba Ye Mi), Indiana University, and Michigan State University (through their open resources work with Foreign Language Teaching Assistants) provide valuable general online resources, and other open resources for African languages. These typically lack specific-purpose content.

Institutions should conduct their own needs analyses of their student populations and invest in designing targeted materials. This could include developing resources based on real-world content such as news reports, children's programs, and games, alongside activity books that enhance active learning. Collaboration between university language departments and professional faculties (e.g., business schools, law schools) could lead to the creation of field-specific Yoruba materials. For example, partnering with the aviation industry to develop Yoruba versions of flight announcements and safety guides, as famously demonstrated by Captain Bamise of Delta Airlines⁴, could prove highly effective for specific audiences.

Advocating for Robust Government Policy Reforms

Ultimately, comprehensive government policies are essential to elevate the status and use of the Yoruba language across educational and professional sectors, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. Current practices, such as the limited use of Yoruba for legislative

proceedings (e.g., Lagos State House of Assembly on Thursdays and Oyo State House of Assembly on Wednesdays), are insufficient.

Policy should encourage and mandate the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction in core subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Accounting, and vocational fields. This would not only demonstrate the language's utility but also significantly motivate students by highlighting its practical value. By embedding Yoruba in critical domains, such policies would spur the creation of much-needed specific-purpose materials in areas like tourism, religion, politics, and law, thereby enhancing the language's overall value and societal respect.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing valuable initial insights into YLSP material development, has several limitations. First, the sample size of participants was restricted, with only three individuals responding out of eight contacted, primarily due to time constraints. Consequently, the findings are based on the experiences of a small group of Yoruba language teachers and material developers, supplemented by my own observations and teaching experience in both U.S. and Nigerian contexts. This limits the generalization of the findings to a broader population of educators and developers.

Second, there is a shortage of existing literature specifically addressing the development of comprehensive Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes materials. While this limitation is itself a key finding of the study, it meant that the literature review relied heavily on related fields (e.g., terminology development) rather than direct parallels. This lack of prior research might stem from the perceived low demand for such materials, as noted by one of the participants. Future research would benefit from a larger and more diverse participant pool and a deeper exploration of emerging YLSP initiatives if they arise.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the current state and future potential of Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) material development. The challenges identified, ranging from inadequate research and limited material availability to the pervasive effects of colonialism, perceived lack of contextual need, and issues related to teacher training and government policy, collectively underscore the complex socio-linguistic and pedagogical landscape for Yoruba.

Enhancing Student Motivation and Engagement

A key implication of developing YLSP materials, grounded in a thorough needs analysis, is their profound impact on student motivation and engagement. When a curriculum and syllabus are tailored to meet learners' specific linguistic goals (e.g., for tourism, business, or religious purposes), students are more likely to perceive the immediate

relevance and utility of their language studies. This alignment between instruction and learner aspirations can significantly boost intrinsic motivation, as confirmed by educational theories emphasizing learner-centered approaches (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985, Self-Determination Theory). For instance, a student learning Yoruba for family communication might find highly relevant a unit on kinship terms and family dynamics, which is often underrepresented in general textbooks. As Participant A suggested, “When students see that the language can help them in their specific chosen fields or interests, their motivation skyrockets.”

Restructuring Teaching and Learning Processes

The availability of well-designed YLSP materials can also transform the teaching experience. Teachers would no longer need to spend extensive time adapting generic materials or struggling to bridge the gap between general language skills and specific communicative needs. Instead, they could focus on developing and implementing effective tasks and activities directly aligned with specific instructional areas. This not only makes teaching more efficient but also allows for more focused and impactful instruction, directly addressing learning outcomes.

Elevating the Status and Value of Yorùbá Language

Beyond individual classroom benefits, the successful development and integration of YLSP materials have broader implications for the status and value of the Yoruba language itself. By demonstrating Yoruba’s capacity to function effectively in professional, academic, and specific social domains, these materials can challenge the prevailing perception of its limited utility, a perception often exacerbated by the historical impact of colonialism and the dominance of English. As more students enroll in Yoruba programs driven by specific interests, and as the language is successfully applied in new contexts, the demand for and prestige of Yoruba in various institutions of learning and professional sectors are likely to increase. This contributes to the broader decolonization of the curriculum movement, positioning African languages as viable tools for diverse intellectual and practical pursuits. The experiences shared by participants underscore that visible utility is a powerful driver for language growth and development.

Conclusion

This study has provided critical insights into the various challenges hindering the development of Yoruba Language for Specific Purposes (YLSP) teaching materials. Our findings reveal a complex interplay of systemic issues, including a significant lack of specialized research, the limited availability and accessibility of existing resources, a prevailing perception of insufficient contextual need, the enduring legacy of colonialism, a shortage of passionately trained teachers and researchers in YLSP, and inadequate government policy support for indigenous languages.

To overcome these barriers, we propose a set of interconnected strategies: conducting rigorous needs analyses to align materials with learner goals, fostering comprehensive curriculum and syllabus development that explicitly incorporates YLSP, promoting robust collaboration among educators, researchers, and material developers, ensuring sustained institutional support for YLSP initiatives, and advocating for more impactful government policy reforms that elevate the functional status of the Yoruba language. By embracing these recommendations, the field can cultivate a more dynamic and responsive Yoruba language pedagogy, ultimately enhancing student motivation and positioning Yoruba as a vibrant language capable of addressing diverse communicative needs in a globalized world.

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Endnotes

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2. [\(PDF\) Yoruba Language Use in Lagos State Legislative Assembly: Challenges and Prospects](#)
3. <https://afriktimes.com/oyo-assembly-holds-historic-yoruba-language-plenary-moves-to-preserve-culture-and-tackle-insecurity/>
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