

NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING

Vol. 14 No. 2
May 2016

ISSN 1117 - 1855

**Publication of the Primary and Tertiary Teacher
Education Association of Nigeria (PATTEAN)**

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INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR SECONDARY CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

Badru, Surajudeen Adewale

&

Ojo, Oludare David

Department Of Arts Education,
Faculty Of Education,

Abstract

One of the pressing educational problems of public interest is that of poor level of achievement, especially in public examinations. This study is carried out to investigate the influence of mother-tongue (MT) on students' achievement in English language in the Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE). The study examined if MT is the only cause of students' dismal performance in English language or otherwise. The sample for this study was one hundred and twenty students drawn from six government-owned junior secondary schools in Irepo/ Olorunsogo State constituency of Oyo State. A 16-item researcher-designed questionnaire was used as instrument to gather data. Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the research questions raised. The findings revealed that MT influences students' achievement at the JSCE; the environment was a major influence on students' achievement and parents, to a large extent, determine their children's achievement in English language. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the medium of instruction in English language classes should be majorly English; modern techniques of teaching the subjects should be adopted by the teachers; literary and debating societies should be encouraged in schools to improve the basic language skills of the students; and e-learning library should be encouraged.

Introduction

Mother tongue (MT) simply means the language of the child's family unit used at home, or the language spoken around the child's place of origin (Bamidele, 2005). It is a language which the child acquires during his formative period and which he also has the highest linguistic

control of both in oral and written forms. English language on the other hand, is Nigeria's official language, the lingua franca. The language serves as a medium of instruction from upper primary to the tertiary level of education (FRN, 2013). The significance of English language acquisition as a stepping-stone for proficiency in other school subjects cannot be over-emphasised. The knowledge of English language is important for educational, political, economical and national development of a country such as Nigeria.

Also, English is the official language of administration and commerce. It is a major language of science, too. This derives much from its utilitarian value to the larger community. Kolawole (2004) emphasises the importance of the use of English language in improving communication among various ethnic groups in Nigeria, which according to Fagbohun (2004) are about 530. English Language is the gate-way to any meaningful educational achievement right from the primary school level. This is why much emphasis is placed on the passing of English language, at least, at credit level, in addition to other subjects, to enable any candidate gain admission into any Nigerian tertiary institution, to learn or be placed well in a lucrative white collar job. Stagnant achievement in English language at any level of education in Nigeria is worrisome. Okoro (2002), states that the problem of the poor educational achievement of primary pupils and secondary school students is a serious one in Nigeria. According to him, "this was in spite of the fact that Nigeria had set up goals for increasing minimum level of learning by the year 1995 (21 years ago). He observes that ample evidence of poor performance were still observed as the pupils move up the ladder."

The way English language is taught in primary and secondary schools may be blamed for some of the lapses observed in the language achievement and skills of the learners. This could be one of the reasons why Ohia (1997) criticises the traditional teaching technique used in English language classes. However, Folayajo (1997) holds a different view on the use of English language in the early years of primary school. He based his arguments on the Ife Six-year Primary Project (SYPP), which advocates the use of Yoruba language as a medium of instruction in primary schools. According to him, many children were taught during the pilot project at Saint Stephen's A School, Ibadan, Ogun State between 1971 and 1976 were on one hand, who had a good understanding and control of Yoruba language (read and write in Yoruba very well), and on the other hand, have a good command of English language. The outcome of this study can be applied to the primary school, too.

The outcome of the Ife project among others could be some of the reasons why Adewuyi (2011) is agitating and making a case for Yoruba language in education. He posits that many Nigerians, Yoruba parents especially, who bring up their children with the English language these days are doing a disservice to their kids. He stresses further that every language is backed with a way of life and speaking English to our children at home is dehumanizing them. He then states that, a high failure rate experienced in the school certificate examinations is due to poor methods of teaching English language. Kolawole and Dele (2002) have the same view on the use of MT in the early years of education. They opine that the use of MT in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps, not only to preserve and value one's culture, but also to develop it locally. According to them, the use of foreign language (English) in the early years of education makes the average school child, unable to be sufficiently literate in either the MT or the English Language.

However, David (1990) feels that to use English language at the primary school level, will lead to the children having a mental translation of all concepts presented in English to their MT in order to gain sufficient meanings of the concepts presented. Galina (2009) is of the opinion that the state-of-the-art teaching of languages is based on the communicative method, which emphasizes the teaching of English through English. However, the idea of abandoning the native tongue, according to him, is too stressful to many learners who need a sense of security in the experience of learning a foreign language. In the past, the prevalence of Grammar-Translation Method (GMT) led to the extra-ordinary phenomenon. Students were unable to speak fluently after having studied the language for a long time. This led to the idea that all-use of MT in the language classroom should be avoided (Harmer, 2001:121). According to him, translation has been thought as uncommunicative, boring, pointless, difficult and irrelevant.

Mother tongue use in the classroom can cause students to think that words and structures in English have an L₁ correspondence, which is not always the case. Therefore, raising students' consciousness of the non-parallel nature of language is likely to allow learners to think comparatively. Harner (2001) suggests factors that can be considered in order to reach a balance of the MT use in learning. According to him, the factors are: the students' previous experience, the students' level, the stage of the course, and the stage of the individual lesson. English teachers tend to take a monolingual approach, thus neglecting the importance of translation in the process of teaching English. The English as a second language (ELS) classroom cannot follow the motto: One

nation, one people, one language (Galina, 2009). Quite contrary to the MT of the students should by all means be acknowledged. The importance is highlighted even more by the fact that the students' culture is part of their language, and by neglecting their culture which leads to the danger of neglecting their identity as well.

Statement of the Problem

One of the pressing educational problems of public interest is the low level of students' achievement, especially in public examinations (Kolawole, 2005). This problem of under-achievement among school students has persisted in many subject areas such as Yoruba, mathematics, sciences and most especially, English language (Folayan, 1997). The poor level of performance in many subject areas may be due to poor foundation in English language and MT interference, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education.

A problem of poor performance (achievement) in the School Certificate Examinations begins at the junior secondary school level, even, at the primary level. It seems that MT of the children (students) does play a significant role in students' performance in English language, especially at the junior secondary school level. As a result of influence of MT on the teaching/learning of English language, and subsequently, the performance/achievement, students are not able to communicate effectively in English language and this invariably affects their performance in the subject. It is very sad to see that many students who are badly taught in English at an early stage have problems with understanding the language and they cannot perform well in examinations, especially, the external ones. However, some teachers see it as appropriate to use bilingual approach to the teaching of English language, while some prefer a direct approach, not considering the linguistic background of the students. Though, poor achievement in English language examination can also be blamed on the skills of the learners themselves.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised in the course of the study:

1. How does mother tongue influence junior secondary school students' achievement in English language?
2. What is the influence of parents on junior secondary school students' achievement in English language?

3. What is the influence of junior secondary school students' environment on their achievement in English language?

Instrument

A seventeen-item researcher-designed questionnaire tagged: Mother Tongue Influence on English Language (MTIEL) was used to elicit information on how mother tongue influences students' performance in JSSCE English language. The questionnaire has two sections: A and B. Section A addresses the demographic data of the respondents i.e. age, gender and department, while section B contains a 13-item statement on mother tongue influence on students' performance in English language. Each of these 14 items has three options: Yes, No and Undecided.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive survey of a cross-sectional type designed to examine the influence of mother tongue on students' performance in Junior Secondary School Examination (JSSCE) in six randomly selected secondary schools in Irepo/Olorunsogo State constituency of Oyo State, Nigeria. A descriptive research in education, according to Fajemidagba (1995) involves collection of data for the purpose of describing existing educational phenomenon.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was junior secondary school students who participated in the 2014/2015 Junior School Certificate examination (JSCE) in Irepo/Olorunsogo State constituency of Oyo State. The target population is public senior secondary school 1 students in the constituency. Six schools were randomly selected, while 120 students, 20 from each of the schools were randomly selected, too. The schools selected were those that have been presenting candidates for the JSCE for at least fifteen years. The respondents' ages ranged between 14 and 20 years.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and percentage. Percentage is the most widely used descriptive statistic which could yield valuable quantitative and qualitative results. Percentage is relevant in qualitative illustration, because it is useful in simple explanation of the basic differences or similarities that could exist between or among variables under consideration (observation).

Data Analysis and Results**Table 1: Distribution of respondents by gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	43.33
Female	68	56.67
Total	120	100.00

The above table indicates that 43.33% of the respondents used males, while 56.67% were females.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13-15	79	65.83
16-17	28	23.34
18-20	13	10.83
Total	120	100.00

Table 2 above shows that, 65.83%, 23.34% and 10.83% of respondents were between the ages of 14 and 20.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by grades in JSCE

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
A		07
B		13
C		79
P		21
F		-
Total		120100.00

Analysis in table 3above indicates that 5.83% of the respondents have A in English language, while 10.84%, 65.83% and 17.50% have B, C and P in the subject respectively. It could be observed that none of the respondents had F in the subject. This is due to the fact that, any student who fails English language at JSCE cannot transit to the senior school.

Table 4: Responses of students who believed that their English can be improved upon with modern techniques of teaching

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	96	80.00
No	12	10.00
Undecided	12	10.00
Total	120	100.00

Table 4 above indicates that 80% of the respondents were of the opinion that their English language can be improved upon with modern techniques of teaching, while 10% disagreed. Also, 10% were undecided.

Table 5: Responses of the subjects on whether they consider English language a difficult subject

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	52	60.00
No	36	30.00
Undecided	12	10.00
Total	120	100.00

Table 5 above indicates that 60.00% of the respondents considered English language a difficult subject, while 10.00% was not. However, 30.00% do not see the subject a difficult one.

Table 6: The responses of respondents (students) on whether or not their parents communicate with them in English at home

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	30.00
No	84	70.00
Undecided-	00.00	
Total	120	100.00

Table 6 shows that 30% of the respondents' parents do communicate with them at home in English language; while 70.00% disagreed. No parents interact with them in English language at home.

Table 7: The responses of students on if they find the structure of English language difficult.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	40.00
No	66	55.00
Undecided	06	05.00
Total	120	100.00

In table 7 above, analysis shows that 40% of the respondents find the structure of English language difficult, while 55.00% do not see any difficult aspect of the language. However, 5.00% of the respondents decide on this item.

Table 8: Percentage of the respondents who prefer the English language to be taught through a bilingual approach

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	73.33
No	32	26.67
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Analysis in Table 8 above indicates that 73.33% of the respondents agreed that a bilingual approach should be used in teaching English language, while 26.67% of the respondents disagreed.

Table 9: Responses of students on if they prefer watching and listening to radio and television programmes in English or Yoruba language.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	72	60.00
No	48	40.00
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Table 9 above shows that 60% of the respondents agreed with the statement that they prefer watching and listening to radio and television programmes in Yoruba language to English. On the other hand, 40% of the respondents were against this statement, while 0% was undecided.

Table 10: Percentage of students who prefer reading newspaper written in English language to those written in MT

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	87	72.50
No	33	27.50
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Analysis in table 10 above indicates that 72.50% of the respondents prefer reading newspapers written in English language to those written in mother tongue. However, 27.50% of those respondents prefer reading newspapers written in the mother tongue.

Table 11: Percentage of respondents who prefer Yoruba language to English language

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	84	70.00
No	36	30.00
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Analysis in table 11 above shows that 70% of the respondents prefer Yoruba language to English language, while 30% prefer English language to Yoruba language, 0.0% was undecided.

Table 12: Percentage of respondents who score higher mark in Yoruba language than in English language

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	77	64.17
No	43	35.83
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Table 12 above indicates that 64.17% of the respondents score higher mark in Yoruba language than in English language, while 35.83% was of contrary opinion. Also, 0.00% of the respondents were undecided.

Table 13: Responses of students who agreed that their MT hinders their interest in studying English Language

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	32.50
No	72	60.00
Undecided	09	07.50
Total	120	100.00

In Table 13 above, analysis indicates that only 32.50% of respondents were of the opinion that their MT hinders their interest in studying English language. 60.00% was of a contrary opinion, while 07.50% was undecided.

Table 14: Percentage of respondents who agreed that they are interested to master English language to perfection

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	108	90.00
No	09	7.50
Undecided	03	2.50
Total	120	100.00

Analysis in table 14 above shows that 90% of the respondents agreed that they are interested to master English language to perfection. 7.50% of the respondents were of a contrary opinion, while 2.50% was undecided.

Table 15: Percentage of respondents who avoid English classes despite its status as a core-subject and medium of instruction

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	06	5.00
No	114	95.00
Undecided	-	00.00
Total	120	100.00

Table 15 above shows that, 05.00% of the respondents avoid English lessons (classes), while 95.00% was of a contrary opinion.

Table 16: Percentage of respondents who feel comfortable in the company of friends who speak English language

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	57.50
No	36	30.00
Undecided	15	12.50
Total	120	100.00

Analysis in table 16 above indicates that 57.50% of the respondents feel comfortable in the company of friends who speak English, while 12.50% are not decided. However, 30.00% of the respondents feel uncomfortable.

Discussion

Analysis from Table 4 indicates that a larger percentage (80%) of the students (respondents) was of the opinion that their usage and performance in English language can be improved upon. This indicates that the students believed that they can learn better if their teachers use modern techniques to teach English. However, in Table 5, analysis shows that majority of the students considered English language as a difficult subject. The factors that could make students to consider English language a difficult subject may be traced to the teaching techniques, the teacher and environment among others.

From Table 6, analysis indicates that just a few (17.50%) of the students' parents interact with them in English language at home. This could have adverse effect on the students' performance, because they are not interacting with them in the mother tongue. Finding in Table 7 indicates that, majority (55.00%) of the students do not find the structure of English language difficult. This could be that most of the students do stay focused when the structure of the language is presented to them in the class. In Table 8, analysis reveals that most of the students (73.33) prefer English to be translated (transfer) to their MT for teaching. This finding suggests that majority of the students prefer the transfer approach to the teaching of English language. This could be to the students' linguistic background.

From Table 9 analysis shows that majority of the respondents prefer listening and watching radio and television programmes in English language to Yoruba language. Sport programmes channeled in English language could be one of the contributory factors to this. The youths loved listening to football commentaries and watching football matches which are being broadcast in English

language. A critical analysis of Table 10 shows that just a few (27.50%) respondents prefer reading newspapers written in MT. This could be because; Yoruba language is difficult to read due to its intricate tonal marks.

A critical analysis of Table 11 indicates that majority (70.00%) of the respondents prefer Yoruba language class to English language. This could be because the respondents have cultural and linguistic confidence over Yoruba language. And they will feel comfortable during Yoruba language class, unlike English language which is a foreign language. This could also be said of the finding in Table 12, where most (65.00%) of the respondents say they score higher mark in Yoruba language than in English.

Finding in Table 13 indicates that a large number of students (60.00%) were of the opinion that their MT do interfere and hinder the studying of English. This is confirmed in Table 14, where 90.00% of the respondents were interested in improving their knowledge and mastery of the language to perfection. This is because English language is "fail-or-fail-all". This is why finding in Table 15 revealed that 95.00% of the respondents do not run away from English language classes. However, Table 16 showed that 30% of the respondents do not feel comfortable in the company of their friends who speak English.

Conclusion

Major findings of this result revealed that mother tongue has a significant influence on students' performance in English language in Junior School Certificate Examination. This influence is negative because, students perform poorly in English language due to mother tongue interference. This affects their speaking and reading skills and invariably, their performance. There are other contributory factors that influence students' performance in English language. These factors include the home, the teacher and his teaching techniques, the students themselves and the environment among others. In conclusion, students' performance in English language is very poor and drastic measures should be taken to rescue the students in particular and the nation in general from further calamity.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in line with the findings of this study:

1. The medium of instruction for teaching English language should be English, however, some concepts which demand for a bilingual

approach should be taught so. This is to aid students' understanding of the subject.

2. To improve reading and writing habits of the students, literary and debating society should be encouraged in various schools. This will definitely improve students' proficiency in reading and writing in particular and their performance in English language in general.
3. The environment and parents are two of the major factors that influence students' performance. The parents should always encourage their children to study and give them the necessary support, while a conducive environment should be ensured for effective learning.

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