

Mother Tongue and Academic Achievement in English Language in Selected Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the mother tongue and academic achievement of English-language students in selected senior secondary schools in Ekiti State. The study employed the quasi-experimental research design. The instrument for data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire. The instrument was subjected to both validity and radiality tests. Data was collected among 240 students in junior secondary schools in two selected cities in Ekiti State. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (ANCOVA) at $P < 0.05$ significance level. Findings from the study exposed that the mother tongue had a mean score of 16.55, while those taught using the English Language and a combination of English language and mother tongue had mean scores of 17.95 and 17.06 before treatment. On exposure to treatment, students in the mother tongue group had the highest mean score of 32.20, followed by those exposed to a combination of English Language and mother tongue (mean=28.68) while those taught with English Language had the lowest mean score of 24.25. The result shows that achievement mean scores of female students in all the groups slightly outweighed their female counterparts except those taught using the English Language. That is male-mother tongue (mean=31.28), female-mother tongue (mean=33.13), male-English Language (mean=24.47), female-English Language=24.02, male-English Language+ mother tongue (mean=28.20), female-English Language +mother tongue (mean=29.15). The result shows that achievement mean scores of urban students in all the groups slightly outweighed their rural counterparts except those taught using a combination of English Language and mother tongue. That is, rural-mother tongue (mean=33.13), urban-mother tongue (mean=31.20), rural-English Language (mean=24.02), urban-English Language=24.65, rural-English Language+ mother tongue (mean=29.15), urban-English Language +mother tongue (mean=28.68). There is a significant difference in the performance mean scores of students taught using English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue before and after treatments. The treatment accounted for about 32.4% ($\text{Eta}^2 = 0.324$) of the observed variance in the performance mean scores of students. The study concluded that the mother tongue is crucial and must be considered in teaching teaching-learning process for better academic performance of students in the English language.

Keywords: Students, Academic Performance, English Language, Mother Tongue, Senior Secondary Schools, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Assessment of pupils' learning achievement during the formative ages has been long reported in the literature (William et al., 2010) (Code, Zap, & Ralph, 2021). Besides, assessing student achievement in the basic subjects and courses remains a universally acceptable method of training in primary and secondary schools (Reyad et al., 2019). In many elementary educational institutions across the globe, pupils are expected to perform well in their tests and examinations as a way to boost their overall academic performance (Alilyyani et al., 2018). Although this is a popular method of assessment, the use of the mother tongue in the classroom has also been reported, although not as popular as the use of tests and examination scores (Çifçi, 2016). The idea of mother tongue simply means the language that is being spoken in a person's parental language, such as English, Portuguese and Yoruba. It has generally been established that pupils who are taught in their mother tongue across various subjects have the potential to perform much better than those taught in foreign languages (Velasco, 2018). It is universally acceptable that communicating classroom instruction in the mother tongue can enhance learning and teaching as teachers endeavour to communicate in a language that is easily understood by the pupils (Yadav, 2014; (Systems-feas, 2013); (Hussein, 2017); (Velasco, 2018). Communicating and or sharing knowledge in the mother tongue has the potential to enhance knowledge transfer from teacher to student and can be very helpful in classroom achievement and academic performance (Alilyyani et al., 2018). Several authors (Englis & Boholano, 2022) (Ghaderi & Talebi, 2020) have alluded to this assertion that classroom relationship is better established through the use of mother-tongue (Bienkowski et al., 2014). In a study conducted (Kolman et al., n.d.), it was emphasised that communicating in the mother tongue can enhance reading among students in mathematics class (Englis & Boholano, 2022) (Kolman et al., n.d.). This also applies in the teaching of all other subjects offered at the elementary and middle schools. Besides, a literature review has shown that pupils taught using their mother tongue tend to remember and retain classroom experience than those taught with a foreign language. In a related study (Oducado et al., 2020), it was conveyed that it is better to introduce English language classes at the elementary level if pupils are to gain mastery of what is being taught.

While there are divergent views among scholars (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013) on whether the mother tongue should be used as the primary language of communicating English and mathematics education, literature has established that teaching these subjects in the mother tongue will help to gain the best attention of the pupils (Cirocki et al., 2019); (Kolman et al., n.d.); (Englis & Boholano, 2022). With regards to building and developing reading culture in young minds, scholars have reasoned that using the mother tongue remains an instrument for achieving this all-important culture (Manel et al., 2019). This has been agreed by teachers and researchers in childhood education both in developing and developed countries (Health et al., 2020) (Kotimäki et al., 2020). To a large extent, teachers' beliefs have been identified as a major determinant of interest when deciding whether to use their mother tongue in classroom instruction and cognitive development or not. It has been argued in a related study that teachers generally play a major role in the introduction and acceptance of the mother tongue in a classroom setting (Ricohermoso et al., 2019). In many developed countries, there seem to be mixed feelings in this regard (Zacharias & Abington, 2016), while in other settings the only language of instruction remains the mother tongue (Velasco, 2018); (Hussein, 2017). Scholars have examined the perception of students and teachers on the use of mother tongue in the classroom (Tri & Nguyen, 2014); (Zubković et al., 2017); (Aydogmus, 2019); (Tezci, 2010). On one hand, in all of these studies, students expressed their preference and acceptance of their mother tongue in classroom instruction over the use of foreign languages. On the other hand, many teachers recommended the addition of ICT to the use of the English language and or other internationally recognized languages of instruction in the primary and secondary levels of education (Timor, 2012).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The universal acceptability of the mother tongue in classroom settings has been documented in the literature, although with differing perspectives (Yadav, 2014) Systems-feas, 2013) (Velasco, 2018). While it is not uncommon that non-native speaking groups in a

classroom setting may prefer the use of a universally recognized language of instruction (Systems-feas, 2013), there seems to be a generally high level of acceptance of classroom instruction in mother tongues. Besides, literature has shown that efforts need to be directed towards encouraging the use of mother tongues as language of instruction in elementary schools (Bienkowski et al., 2014); (Paker & Karaağaç, 2015); (Harbord, 1992) to better manage the pupils' understanding in their basic subjects such as mathematics and English (Systems-feas, 2013). A universal practice of pupils' academic performance is often associated with their performance in classroom assessments, tests and examinations (Ruth & Harcourt, 2018). However, aside from tests and examinations, a critical indicator of performance is the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction at elementary and middle schools. There is a dearth of literature in Nigeria on the extent to which students' academic performance is based on their mother tongue as the language of instruction.

1.2 Study objectives

This study attempts to specifically look at the following:

- i. Determine the performance mean score of students before and after treatment.
- ii. Ascertain the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by gender.
- iii. Assess the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by school location.

1.3 Research questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment?
2. What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by gender?
3. What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by school location?
4. What are the ANCOVA of students' performance by treatment?

2. Methodology

A quasi-experimental research design was adopted in this study. It is a factorial research design of 3 by 2 by 2 that is, the treatments of 3 subjects comprising English language, Yoruba, and Yoruba plus English. The research design was suitable to ascertain the difference in the opinions of the students on the effects of mother tongue on students' academic performance in the English language at Junior Secondary Schools in Ekiti State. The study was conducted among a population of junior secondary school students in urban and semi-rural areas of Ekiti State, that is, Ado-Ekiti and Oye-Ekiti, respectively. A total of six secondary school students participated in this study in three junior secondary schools (JSS II) in each of the two cities. From Oye Local Government Area, one school was treated for English language (St. Augustine Comprehensive High School), the second school was treated for Yoruba language (Oye-Egbo High School), while the third school was treated for both English and Yoruba languages (Obalatan Community High School). In addition, three junior secondary schools, Baptist Comprehensive High School, CAC Comprehensive High School and Olaoluwa Muslim Grammar School were selected from Ado Local Government Area and similar treatment was administered in three selected schools with English language in the first School; Yoruba language in the second School, while English language and Yoruba language was treated in the third school respectively.

The sample size of two hundred and forty (240) JSS 2 students was used using multi-stage sampling techniques. In the first stage, Ekiti State was stratified into senatorial districts, out of which two local government areas were randomly selected, that is, Ado and Oye-Ekiti Local Government Areas. In the second stage, six (6) junior secondary schools were randomly selected, with three (3) junior

secondary schools selected from the two (2) Local Government Areas through simple random sampling. In the third stage, forty (40) participants were purposively selected from each of the selected junior secondary schools, comprising twenty (20) males and twenty (20) females. The research instrument tagged "Effects of mother tongue on the performance of students in English Language at Junior Secondary Schools in Ado-Ekiti and Oye -Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State" (EMSLGAES) was designed for the study. The instrument consists of two sections; section A consists of the bio-data of the participants, while section B consists of two sub-sections: English and Yoruba. Forty (40) items were used to elicit responses from the participants on grammar in the English language (noun, verb, adjectives, and pronoun) and 40 items were to elicit responses from the participants on Yoruba Grammar mother tongue (Oro-ise, Oro oruko, aropooruko, Oro apejuwe). The instrument was subjected to both validity and radiality tests. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (ANCOVA) at $P < 0.05$ significance level. The analysis was done with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

3. Results and analysis

Table 1: Analysis of Participants' Socio-demographic Information

Demographic Variables	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
Name of school	Oyeegbo	40	16.7
	St Augustine	40	16.7
	Olaoluwa	40	16.7
	Obalatan	40	16.7
	Baptist	40	16.7
	CAC	40	16.7
Treatment groups	Yoruba	80	33.3
	English	80	33.3
	Yoruba & English	80	33.3
Sex	Male	120	50.0
	Female	120	50.0
School location	Rural	120	50.0
	Urban	120	50.0

The data in Table 1 shows that 40 students, representing 16.7% of the study participants, were drawn from each school. Distribution according to treatment groups indicates that 80 students, representing 33.3% of the total sample, were taught using the mother tongue (Yoruba), conventional instructional language (English) and a combination of both languages in each case. The sample comprised of 120 (50%) male students and 120 (50%) female respondents. Stratification along the school location line reveals that half of the study participants ($n=120$, 50%) were selected from urban and rural areas in each case.

3.1 Analysis of Research Questions

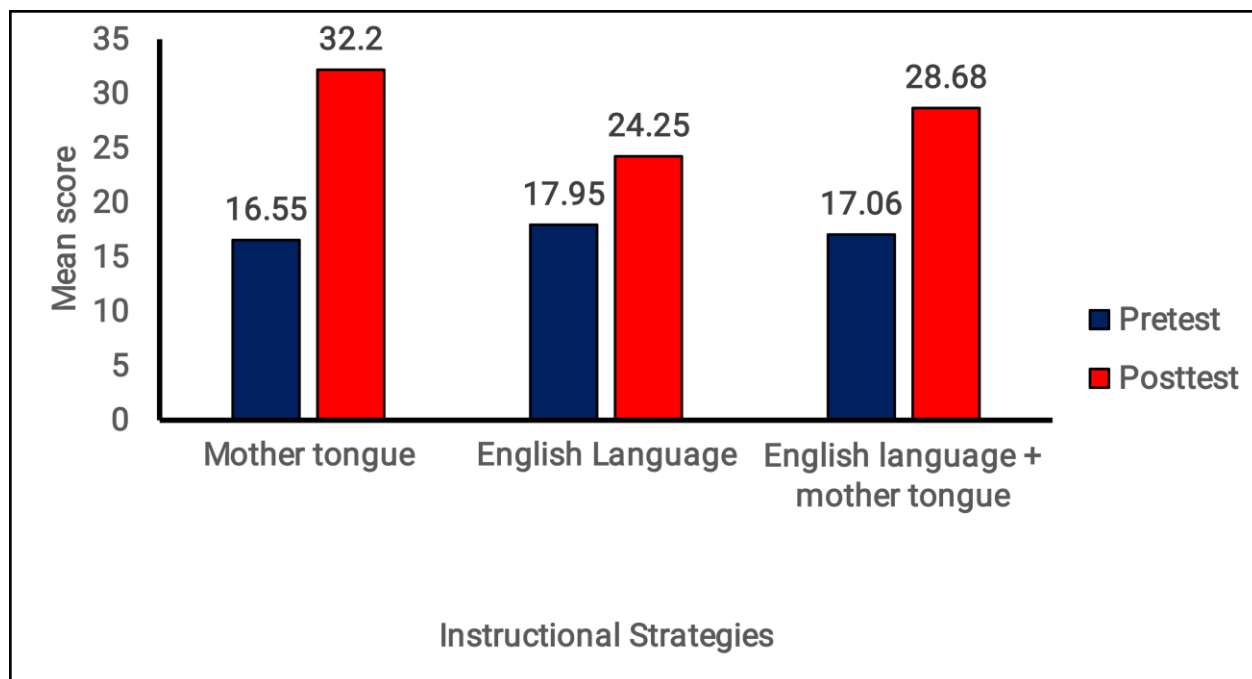
Question 1: What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment?

Table 2: Performance mean scores of students before and after treatments

Teaching Strategies	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference	Rank
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Mother tongue	80	16.55	4.45	32.20	4.13	15.65	1 st
English Language	80	17.95	5.94	24.25	5.06	6.30	3 rd
English language with mother tongue	80	17.06	5.18	28.68	5.39	11.62	2 nd
Total	240	17.19	5.24	28.38	5.86	11.19	

The obtained data in Table 2 shows that students exposed to their mother tongue had a mean score of 16.55, while those taught using the English Language and a combination of English language and mother tongue had mean scores of 17.95 and 17.06, respectively, prior to treatment. On exposure to treatment, students in the mother tongue group had the highest mean score of 32.20, followed by those exposed to a combination of English Language and mother tongue (mean=28.68) while those taught with English Language had the lowest mean score of 24.25. This implies that there is a difference in the performance achievements of students exposed to English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments. The academic performance of students exposed to English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments is further depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Performance mean scores of students in English before and after treatments



Question 2: What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by gender?

Table 3: Performance mean scores of students before and after treatments by gender

Teaching Strategies	N	Male				N	Female			
		Pretest		Posttest			Pretest		Posttest	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mother tongue	40	16.10	3.27	31.28	4.08	40	17.00	5.38	33.13	4.01
English Language	40	18.08	5.81	24.47	5.21	40	17.82	6.14	24.02	4.95
English language + mother tongue	40	16.58	5.58	28.20	5.42	40	17.55	4.77	29.15	5.39
Total	120	16.92	5.05	27.98	5.64	120	17.46	5.43	28.77	6.07

The data in Table 3 presents the moderating effect of gender on the academic achievements of students exposed to English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments. The result shows that achievement mean scores of female students in all the groups slightly outweighed their female counterparts except those taught using the English Language. That is male-mother tongue (mean=31.28), female-mother tongue (mean=33.13), male-English Language (mean=24.47), female-English Language=24.02), male-English Language+ mother tongue (mean=28.20), female-English Language +mother tongue (mean=29.15). This implies that gender had a slightly moderating effect on the academic achievements of students exposed to English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments.

Question 3: What is the performance mean score of students before and after treatment by school location?

Table 4: Performance mean scores of students before and after treatments by school location

Teaching Strategies	N	Rural				N	Urban			
		Pretest		Posttest			Pretest		Pretest	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mother tongue	40	17.00	5.38	33.13	4.01	40	15.42	2.69	31.20	3.73
English Language	40	17.82	6.14	24.02	4.95	40	16.92	5.06	24.65	4.80
English language + mother tongue	40	17.55	4.77	29.15	5.39	40	17.95	5.97	28.68	5.31
Total	120	17.46	5.43	28.77	6.07	120	16.77	4.85	28.17	5.36

The results depicted in Table 4 present the academic performance of students exposed to the use of English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatment based on the school location. The result shows that achievement mean scores of urban students in all the groups slightly outweighed their rural counterparts except those taught using a combination of English Language and mother tongue. That is, rural-mother tongue (mean=33.13), urban-mother tongue (mean=31.20), rural-English Language (mean=24.02), urban-English Language=24.65), rural-English Language+ mother tongue (mean=29.15), urban-English Language +mother tongue (mean=28.68). This implies that school location had little moderating effect on the academic achievements of students exposed to English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments.

Question 5: What are the ANCOVA of student performance by treatment?

Table 5: ANCOVA of students' performance by treatment

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial Eta ²
Corrected Model	2687.233	3	895.744	38.359	.000	.328
Covariate (Pretest)	148.333	1	148.333	6.352	.012	.026
Group	2644.345	2	1322.172	56.620	.000	.324
Error	5511.017	236	23.352			
Total	201432.000	240				

Corrected Total	8198.250	239
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***p<0.05**

Table 4 indicates that the computed F-value (56.620) obtained for the groups with a p-value <0.05 was significant at the 0.05 level. The null hypothesis is rejected; this implies that there is a significant difference in the performance mean scores of students taught using English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue before and after treatments. The treatment accounted for about 32.4% ($\text{Eta}^2 = 0.324$) of the observed variance in the performance mean scores of students.

4. Discussion

This study centred essentially on the mother tongue and academic achievement of English-language students in selected senior secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed a statistically significant difference in the academic performance of students exposed to the English Language with their mother tongue compared with those not exposed to their mother tongue and a combination of English Language and mother tongue instructional strategies before and after treatments. This implies that teaching in the mother tongue will not only guarantee comprehension but will also enhance knowledge transfer with clarity. This finding agrees with those of the study (Yadav, 2014), who had made similar assertions in their studies, corroborating the fact that the role of the mother tongue in learning and teaching cannot be overemphasised. Another significant finding is that the study revealed no statistically significant difference in the performance and strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of the English language in the selected secondary schools. In other words, the findings indicated that the performance and strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in teaching and learning did nothing to change the teaching and learning of the pupils selected for the current study. Implying that there is no superior argument to disconnect the mother tongue from effective teaching and learning in secondary school. Instead, it means that the mother tongue should be encouraged as much as possible for sustainable knowledge transfer from teachers to students. These findings from the current study negate the findings of Velasco (2018), which state that the prospect of using the mother tongue as a language of instruction is not feasible in Nigeria, at least in the foreseeable future.

With regards to gender difference, findings from the study revealed that female students outclass their male counterparts in the English language, while in the Yoruba language, the finding was at variance. In other words, there were more females in the study population than their male counterparts in English language class at the period of this research. This could also imply that there was higher female student enrolment among the selected schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Besides, the difference might be due to the geographical location, treatments and critical other learning factors in Nigeria, such as inadequate infrastructure in many schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This implies that irrespective of gender, the mother tongue has a statistically significant influence on students' academic performance.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The outcome of this study revealed that English Language, mother tongue and combination of English Language and mother tongue as instructional strategies had a statistically significant effect on the academic performance of students in the selected secondary schools in Ekiti State. The study concluded that school location and gender have no statistically significant interaction effect on student's academic performance in the English language. The study further concluded that students exposed to the use of the mother tongue instructional strategy had the highest estimated margin, closely followed by those taught using a combination of English Language and mother tongue, while the students exposed to only English Language had the least estimated margin. It was

recommended that the mother tongue remain crucial and should be considered in the teaching and learning process for the better academic performance of students in the English language in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

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