
The impact of mother tongue interference on students' academic performance in Senior Secondary Schools in Ikere Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Olayinka Omolayo ATURAMU (PhD)

Department of Languages and Linguistics, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study examined the impact of mother tongue interference on students' academic performance in Senior Secondary Schools in Ikere Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The design of the study was a survey research design. This design was considered appropriate and suitable for this study because it focused on obtaining information and analyzing data from a group of students considered to be representative of the entire population. This involve the use of well-structured questionnaire to elicit relevant information from the respondent. This research work is to be carried out within public secondary schools in Ikere local government area of Ekiti State. The population of the study comprises of all secondary school students in ten public secondary schools in the Ikere local government area, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of five public secondary schools in Ikere-Ekiti in which 50 students were selected from five schools. Simple random sampling techniques will be use for the selection. The research instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire which comprises two sections. The first section consisted of students' bio-data and the second section comprises several questions based on the research questions. The instrument was subjected to validity and reliability mechanism. The reliability of the instrument was carried out on 50 respondents which are not part of the sample that was used for the study at two-week interval. The test-re-test method of reliability was used. The two sets of data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC). The correlation coefficient of 0.82 was obtained which implies that the instrument is highly reliable for the study. The researcher visited the sampled schools and explained the purpose of study and how to respond to the questionnaire correctly. She allowed them for about one hour to provide appropriate answers to the questions. She collected the questionnaires, collated and presented them for analysis. The data generated were collated and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Keywords: mother tongue, interference, academic performance, secondary school.

Introduction

Mother tongue interference is a phenomenon viewed by many scholars as, 'mother tongue influence', which had been an actual response to the applied results of the structural methods, known as audio-visual, audio-oral and structural-global (Mamo, 2016) in (Awodun & Joshi, 2022). According to Mamo (2016) in Awodun & Joshi (2022) defines Language interference or transfer as, a persistent term and has led to diverse interpretations and researches. In fact, interference is the early step to integration perceived as a welcome process of using mother tongue or other languages in the using of a target language. This may be based on the facts that interference can appear in phonology, grammar, word formation, word and sentence sequence, etc, (Negeri, 2011) in Mamo (2016).

Language is a method of communicating ideas, thoughts, and desires by means of sounds for psychological and physiological survival (Awodun & Joshi, 2022). Language is one of the most important attributes of mankind because it is the medium of communication. There is no country without a language. We all live in a world of many languages. Thus, language and society

are so much related. Their relationship cannot be underestimated. It is an indispensable medium that helps man to achieve effective communication as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways. It is a fact that language remains the medium of communication in any society. Language is so important to man that one can equate it with the air we breathe. To emphasize the place of language in man's existence, according to Awoniyi (2004) in Adeyemi, Adebola, Bassey & Oluwabunmi (2019) enumerates the use of language to include:

1. To modify and direct the behavior of other people.
2. To influence the ideas of other people. Hence we can persuade another person to change his action, depending on the choice and style of the language we employ.
3. To communicate to others our ideas or information.
4. We also use language as an instrument of thinking because language and thought are like body and soul, each influencing the other, among others.

The language an individual speaks is for him or her, the most expressive and the most beautiful of all languages (Adeyemi, Adebola, Bassey & Oluwabunmi, 2019).

Mother tongue could be defined as the language which a group of people considered being inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thoughts and communication. Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. In terms of that view, the person is defined as a native speaker of the first language, although one may also be a native speaker of more than one language if all of the languages were learned without formal education, such as through cultural immersion before puberty (Oluwole, 2008) in Adeyemi, Adebola, Bassey & Oluwabunmi (2019). Mother tongue largely refers to not only the language one learns from one's mother but also the speaker's dominant and home language. It's also called native language. Learning of a mother tongue takes place in a quite natural way. Regarding the mother tongue, language is learned through input and reciprocal interaction but it's also believed that kids are born with an innate and special ability to discover the underlying rules of a language system. In essence, each particular language in the world (i.e. Ibibio, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, English, French, and German etc.) is a mother tongue of a particular place and time. It is then generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child's environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him, as well as to any society.

The mother tongue is the child's environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built, children learn through communicating in a language, which they understood. Regarding mother tongue, myth is another important element which is vital to explain one's first language."The notion of 'mother tongue' is thus a mixture of myth and ideology. The family is not necessarily the place where languages are transmitted, and sometimes we observe breaks in transmission, often translated by a change of language, with children acquiring as first language the one that dominates in the milieu. This phenomenon concerns all multilingual situations and most of the situations of migration. One's Mother tongue may also be called in other words as first language, dominant language, home language, native tongue or native language.

Farinde & Ojo (2001) in Oyewole (2017) opined that, the first language (L1) or the mother tongue MT is the first language (L1) or the mother tongue is the first language a person pick up in his childhood. It is not learned but acquired. It is a language that encodes early concepts of the child. It is a language that fully identifies with personal or native culture of a multilingual person. Mother tongue is a language in which a multilingual person conducts his everyday actives in which he has the greatest linguistic facilities or initiative knowledge. It is the language in which for the effectiveness of its functions required the learner knowledge of all four basic skill of

learning i.e. speaking, reading and writing. Mother tongue is defined as the language that person, or that a person speaks best, and so is often the basic for socio-linguistics identity. Also it is the language which a group of people considered inhabiting, and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication.

It is very true that identification and isolation of problems implies that they are partly solved. For this reasons, the researcher will carry out a survey in order to look into the impact of mother tongue interference on students' academic performance in secondary school with reference to some selected secondary schools Ikere local government area of Ekiti State.

One cannot but believe that students face a lot of problems in schools and at home. Some of the problems in schools are largely caused by few in-equipped teachers who lacks interest for the profession due to lack of motivation and encouragement owing strongly to the fact that they are human beings who will always like to be motivated in diverse ways as the case maybe.

Among the problems is teacher's poor ability in teaching methodology. Most teachers do not follow the teaching of some subjects in the appropriate order. Those four basic skills of language are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These steps are either presented in a wrong sequence or everything lumped together. Therefore, the study attempted to find out the impact of mother tongue interference on students' academic performance in secondary school with reference to some selected secondary schools Ikere local government area of Ekiti State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Does mother tongue influence students' academic performance in their subjects?
2. Does mother tongue hinder students from mastering their subject?

The Concept of Mother Tongue

Mother tongue or mother language refers to a child's first language, the Language learned in the home from older family members. (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO 2003) in Kingsley (2016) several questions have arisen about what constitutes a Mother Tongue, especially in such urban centers such as Port-Harcourt, Lagos or Abuja in Nigeria where inhabitants come from different parts of the country. In some places, the term has taken on more of a culturally symbolic definition, so that an individual might say, 'I don't actually speak my mother tongue'. Language and identity are linked, as the term Mother Tongue implies. A healthy identity balances different aspects of our personalities. A community expresses part of its identity through its languages and a healthy society makes choices that promote harmonious communities and confident individuals. One of the popular criteria used to define the mother tongue is that it is "the language one thinks, dreams and counts in" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981) in Kingsley (2016). UNESCO (2003) in Kingsley (2016) gave the description of Mother Tongue as the language:

- One has learnt first;
- One identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others,
- One knows best; and
- One uses most.

Historic Review of the Position of Language in Nigeria

In a multilingual and multiethnic environment like Nigeria, a large number of indigenous languages exist and the number has been put differently, Hansford mentions 395; Banjo in Ayilara & Oyedeji says 500,14 and Bamgbose maintains that it is 513 Makinde (2007) in Kingsley

(2016). Despite this large number, English therefore, remain the official national language and as a result the generality of the population is inclined towards oral use of English Language. Practically in our schools system English language has become the preeminent language of education right from the colonial time to the present, as Oderinde (2007) in Kingsley (2016) noted that “English Language rode on the back of British colonialism into Nigeria in the 19th century”, and has since become the medium of instruction right from nursery one and throughout school life. Exclusively, English is taught as a subject at all level while the indigenous languages largely suffer neglect and are mostly restricted to their domains or regions of use Adegbija cited in Abidogun & Adebule (2013) in Kingsley (2016). In fact, of all the indigenous languages, only three have been recognized to be taught within the school system - that is, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo largely for sociopolitical relevance. Oderinde maintained that English language assumed this new status through the instrumentality of aggressive colonial governmental machinery and, through the culpable acquiescence by the indigenous population who perceived the use of English tongue as a symbol being educated. Equally, he argued that the oversea returnees (the educated reprieved slaves) who flaunted their novel Language acquisition to the blind admiration of the locals, and who often times aped them in their speech contributed to the bloated premium placed in English language over Nigerian indigenous languages.

The aping and the idea of looking at English expression as class have led to about 80% (if not higher percentage) of the Nigerian elite in the Southern Nigeria speaking more English to their student in secondary school level than the mother tongue at home. The situation as observed by Ogbona cited in Abidogun & Adebule (2013) in Kingsley (2013) tend to have led to huge imbalance in bilingualism involving English and Nigerian languages to the extent that many educated Nigerians cannot read or write in their native language or Modern Tongue. Fafunwa (2000) in Kingsley (2016) however, through research, established that the best language for good concept formation at a very tender age is the indigenous language. The research was conducted in 1970, at the Institute of Education of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife) in Osun State of Nigeria. The ‘Ife Six-Year Primary Project’ was designed to use Yoruba language as a medium of instruction in primary schools in Osun State of Nigeria. This project was based on the premise that: (a). the child will benefit culturally, socially, linguistically and cognitively. (b). the child’s command of English will be improved if he is taught English as an entirely separate subject by a specialist teacher through the six years.

The Call for the Use of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction

The early Educational stage of student is very essential in the life of every student; hence, the recent focus on its desirability across the globe. However, the first major international support for the idea of using Mother Tongue as a medium for instruction in school emerged at the UNESCO conference in 1951 where it was unanimously agreed that education is best carried out in the Mother Tongue. The conference thus recommended that “students should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue” and that “the use of the mother tongue is extended to as late a stage in education as possible.” UNESCO (2003) in Kingsley (2016).

The Benefits of Mother Tongue as a Medium for Instruction in Schools

Students learn better if they understand the language used as medium for instruction. Even in situations where the main goal of learning is for student to acquire a second language, this too is facilitated by beginning with a language student already know. The relevance of this study is hereby summarized in the following:

1. **Increased access and equity:** the use of Mother Tongue as a medium for instruction, especially in schools in the rural and urban areas will be of great benefit to the people. It will play a key role in keeping students from poor homes in school. Students from poor background with less exposure can feel the sense of belonging as well as being carried along if Mother Tongue is used as a medium for instruction. This is because they understand the instruction being passed across and also can identify the various elements of the instruction.
2. **Improved learning outcomes:** The use of a language that students understand allows teachers to use more active and effective teaching methods as well as instructional materials. Supporting mastery of the first language promotes the cognitive development needed to learn a second language easily. The use of local languages also ensures that the knowledge students bring to school is used as a basis for further learning.
3. **Socio-cultural benefits:** There are values that exist in every society and these values motivate/direct the education in such society and these values are concretized in the curriculum. The curriculum is then used to direct the education processes of the school/institution. The use of local languages for instruction often leads to inclusion of more local content in the curriculum and greater participation of parents and community members as classroom resources. Parents will be better positioned to become involved in the school and to feel that their knowledge and their culture are valued. The legitimization of local languages that comes from their use in schooling can strengthen students, families' and communities' sense of inclusion in schooling. The use of local languages in formal education has a positive impact on adult literacy as well. As parents see their children successfully learn to read and write in their own language, the parents are often motivated to attend literacy classes as well.
4. **Lower costs of education:** The financial benefits of the use of local languages in education derive largely from decreases in repetition and dropout. Equally, instructional resources can easily be sourced for, and can be manufactured locally.
5. **Encourages creativity and Improvisation:** The use of Mother Tongue as a medium for instruction will greatly enhance the students' creativity and improvisation skills. This is because the students will improvise to solve whatever task they are expected to perform, especially when faced with the challenge of unavailability of instructional materials.

A study carried out by Mamo (2016) on mother tongue interference into learning English as a foreign language: analysis of Afan Oromo Interference into learning EFL, Orthography and pronunciation (A Case of Batu Secondary School). The study employed a Systematic Random Sampling technique. The most serious interference manifestations include the knowledge of rules, revealed through resources like; grammar, vocabulary, spelling, tone, stress, syllable, semantic, etc., in both pronunciation and orthography. That, the major factors count on teachers' low concern to teach and the students' ignorance to learn proper orthography and pronunciation; besides, weak methodologies of teaching EFL, lack of ideal situations to use EFL, the dominant influence exerted from Afaan Oromo in everyday communications, lack of sufficient learned EFL elements, origin similarity of Latin alphabets between the MT and EFL, and low concern given to learning EFL orthography and pronunciation in the education curriculum. Hence, the researcher suggests that; EFL teachers and students ought to work critically on the distinct areas among the two languages, adopt supplementary materials, arrange special lessons, encourage outstanding activities, etc. Moreover, EFL curriculum developers, EFL education officials and concerned collaborators need to support, facilitate and control the orthography and pronunciation education; give trainings to update EFL teachers' knowledge and skill, methodologically, materially, morally, financially, etc and control the quality of learning outcomes in some ways.

This study, however, cannot cease all the information areas other than it recites the most recurrent problems and appeals for further studies about MT interferences into learning.

Another study carried out by Adeyemi, Adebola, Bassey & Oluwabunmi (2019) on mother-tongue influence interference in the study of English language among senior secondary schools in Ago Iwoye, Ogun State. Some of the problems observed in the learning of English language in Nigeria are: Problems with the use grammar and tenses, Problems with accent and placement of stresses on words when speaking, difficulties in writing well-structured English sentences and use of punctuations in the appropriate places. This research was carried out using SS1 and SS2 students of some selected secondary schools in Ago Iwoye, where Yoruba is an indigenous language and is mostly used in communication outside classroom setting. Well-structured questionnaire developed by the researchers was the instrument used in collecting data. T-test and chi square were used in the data analysis. The results revealed that public senior secondary school students had a higher level of mother tongue interference in the study of English language than private senior secondary school students with the mean of 16.7 for the public and 15.7 for the private but the difference is not significant ($t=1.719$, $df=158$, $p>.05$). Also there is no significant difference in public and private senior secondary school teachers' perception and strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of English language. The recommendations proposed based on the findings are: organizing seminars for teachers, creating more time for teaching oral English, schools should come up with a reward-punishment system to encourage the use of English language in schools, teachers should cultivate a positive perception towards the use of English language in schools, students should be discouraged from communicating in mother tongue in classroom environments.

Similar study was carried out by Kingsley (2016) on the relevance of mother tongue in the achievement of constructivist science classroom environment at the primary education level in Nigeria. Philosophical research methodology was employed in this study. The study reveals that the relevance of mother tongue as a medium for instruction includes increase access to instruction and equity, improve learning outcome, socio-cultural benefits such as sustainability of acceptable social values and norms, lower costs of education and, encouragement of creativity and improvisation skills. The author recommends that studies be carried out to examine the level of implementation of the recommendations of national policy on education on the use of mother tongue as a medium at lower levels of education in Nigeria.

Methodology

The design of the study was a survey research design. This design was considered appropriate and suitable for this study because it focused on obtaining information and analyzing data from a group of students considered to be representative of the entire population. This involve the use of well-structured questionnaire to elicit relevant information from the respondent

This research work is to be carried out within public secondary schools in Ikere local government area of Ekiti State.

The population of the study comprises of all secondary school students in ten public secondary schools in the Ikere local government area, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The sample consisted of five public secondary schools in Ikere-Ekiti in which 50 students were selected from five schools. Simple random sampling techniques will be use for the selection.

The research instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire which comprises two sections. The first section consisted of students' bio-data and the second section comprises

several questions based on the research questions. The instrument is a four likert scale which is Strongly Agreed = SA, Agreed = A, Disagreed = D, and Strongly Disagreed = SD.

The face and content validities of the instrument were established by the researcher.

The reliability of the instrument was carried out on 50 respondents which are not part of the sample that was used for the study at two-week interval. The test-re-test method of reliability was used. The two sets of data were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC). The correlation coefficient of 0.82 was obtained which implies that the instrument is highly reliable for the study.

The researcher visited the sampled schools and explained the purpose of study and how to respond to the questionnaire correctly. She allowed them for about one hour to provide appropriate answers to the questions. She collected the questionnaires, collated and presented them for analysis.

The data generated were collated and were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Questions raised were answered with mean and standard deviation.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1

Does mother tongue influence students' academic performance?

Table 1

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Decision
1	I always have good grade in Exams when my teacher use mother tongue to teach the subject	32	41	18	9	2.96	0.61	Agreed
2	My school rules and regulation does not permit frequent use of mother tongue in teaching.	39	40	13	8	3.10	0.72	Agreed
3	Aside from Yoruba language, I am not permitted to speak any other language except in English during teaching and learning of other subjects.	38	35	14	13	2.98	0.66	Agreed
4	I understand and assimilate subject content properly when explain in mother tongue.	30	44	18	8	2.96	0.61	Agreed

Mean ≥ 2.5 agreed, < 2.5 disagreed

The table above shows the mean rating of item 1 to 4 as 2.96, 3.10, 2.98 and 2.96 respectively with standard deviation of 0.61, 0.72, 0.66 and 0.61. This means that all the items were accepted since the mean rating is ≥ 2.50 .

Research Question 2

Does mother tongue hinder students from mastering the subject?

Table 2

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Decision
1	If I make use of mother tongue it can affect some topics in Physics	27	37	20	16	2.75	0.48	Agreed
2	If I am addicted to the use of mother tongue I may likely have problem to understand the subject matter.	21	39	22	18	2.63	0.43	Agreed
3	It is better to schools to inculcate into student the school rules of language to be used right from their kindergarten, nursery, primary, secondary to university level.	43	40	10	7	3.19	0.79	Agreed
4	My mother tongue is a reflection of what has been instilled in me from childhood or from my school	25	37	15	23	2.64	0.46	Agreed

Mean ≥ 2.5 agreed, < 2.5 disagreed

The table above shows the mean rating of item 1 to 4 as 2.75, 2.63, 3.19 and 2.64 respectively with standard deviation of 0.48, 0.43, 0.79 and 0.46. This means that all the items were accepted since the mean rating is ≥ 2.50 .

Discussion of the Findings

Research question one sought to find out the how does mother tongue influence academic performance in their subjects. The finding indicated that they always have good grade in their subjects when their teacher uses mother tongue to teach the subject; their school rules and regulation does not permit frequent use of mother tongue in teaching; aside from Yoruba language, the students are not permitted to speak any other language except in English during teaching and learning their subjects; they understand and assimilate subject content properly when explain in mother tongue.

Research question two sought to find out how do mother tongue hinder students from mastering the subject. The finding indicated that making use of mother tongue can affect some topics in their subjects; students are addicted to the use of mother tongue and may likely have problem to understand the subject matter; it is better for schools to inculcate into students the school rules of language to be used right from their kindergarten to university level; mother tongue is a reflection of what has been instilled in them from childhood.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning accurately in secondary school subjects would be effective, if and only the students are taught how to avoid interference of mother tongue element. They would become effective in learning different subjects and their learning will be greatly enhanced.

Moreover, as very many of the local languages have not yet been used for instruction, effort is needed to enable all student to have the same opportunity. Since the study identify that learning of different subjects with mother tongue in one of the most decisive factors in student achievement, a proper implementation of the language policy in mother tongue is required in

education. This study therefore, provides clear evidence for adopting a positive approach towards mother tongues in teaching and learning of different subjects.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Students should be oriented on the importance of maintaining mother tongue in learning.
2. Parents should be encouraged to help in promoting first and second languages on their children.
3. Principal and school management should try to introduce the use of mother tongue in school to aid preservation of other languages.
4. Policy makers should make plans that will favour the use of Nigeria languages for teaching and learning in our secondary schools.

References

- Adeyemi, F.B., Adebola, O.C., Bassey, A.B & Oluwabunmi, O.P. (2019). Mother-tongue influence interference in the study of English Language among Senior Secondary Schools in Ago Iwoye, Ogun State. *Journal of Gender & Behaviour*, 17 (2).
- Adeyemo, S.A. (2010). Teaching and learning of Physics in Nigerian Secondary Schools: The Curriculum Transformation, Issues, Problems and Prospects. *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, 1 (1).
- Awodun, A.O. & Joshi, R.B.(2022). Effects of mother tongue interference in teaching on students' academic performance in Basic Science in Junior Secondary Schools for sustainable Development. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 14(06), 1006-1013.
- Awoniyi, T. (2004) "Utilizing children's Mother Tongue for Effective English Language Teaching". *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association*, 2 (6).
- Farinde, J. & Ojo, K. (2001). An overview of Educational Issues in Nigeria: Thoughts and Reflections.
- Kingsley, O.U. (2016). The Relevance of Mother Tongue In The Achievement Of Constructivist Science Classroom Environment At The Primary Education Level In Nigeria: *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*, 2(4).
- Makinde, S.O (2007). "The Language Factor in the Education of the Nigerian Child", *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2).
- Mamo, G. (2016). Mother Tongue Interference into Learning English as a Foreign Language: Analysis of Afan Oromo Interference into Learning EFL, Orthography and Pronunciation (A Case of Batu Secondary School): *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics* ISSN 2422-8435 26.
- Oderinde, B.B (2007) "English and Arabic in Curriculum Context: Benefit to the Nigerian Society", Inaugural Lecture Series, Lagos: Lagos State University.
- Oyewole, O. (2017). Influence of Mother Tongue in the Teaching and Learning of English Language in Selected Secondary Schools in Ondo State, Nigeria: *Journal of Education and Practice* 8(30).
-