



PERFORMANCE ON A SCALE: THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of mother tongue on the teaching and learning of English Language in North Bank area of Makurdi. The purpose of the study was to find out the extent to which mother tongue influence the teaching and learning of English Language. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Ex-post facto research design was adopted. From the population of two English teachers and 84 SS 2 students, the study sampled 22 respondents for the study comprising 2 English teachers and 20 SS 2 students using multi-stage sampling technique. Influence of Mother Tongue Scale (IMTS) and Students' Performance Test in English (SPTE) were used for data collection. Data collected based on responses from the IMTS and scores from SPTE were analysed using regression to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that mother tongue has significant influence on the performance of teachers in the teaching of English Language. It also found that mother tongue has a significant influence on the performance of students in the learning of English Language. Based on the findings, it was recommended that constant drills and practices of modelling competent users of English Language should be imbibed by teachers and second learners of English Language in order to improve their performance and competence in the use of language.

Keys Words: Performance, mother tongue, teaching, learning, English Language.

Introduction

English language has come to stay in Nigeria and its influence on the social, educational, political, and civic life of the country is becoming more and more widespread. In schools, English serves as the language for teaching and learning other subjects, the language of examination and a subject of study that serves as a visa for admission into tertiary schools in Nigeria (Udu, 2017). The aim of the introduction of English Language into the Nigerian curriculum from primary to tertiary education may not have been achieved despite the lofty policy pronouncements and concerted efforts in its effective teaching. Ochogwu (2018) blamed this on poor quality of Nigerian educational system. Vanguard (2015) believes that achieving this aim means promoting current and reliable data on quality issues and learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills. Promoting these factors in the Nigerian educational system is through the use of English Language.

English Language teaching and learning quality in Nigeria is faced with so many problems. While some researchers (Muodumogu, 2012; Oyetunde, 2013) blamed this on teachers methodologies, other researchers and examination bodies such as the West African Examination Council (WAEC, 2019-2022) Chief Examiner's report on students' performance in English blame the poor performance of students in English Language on mother tongue interference which resulted in transliterations and poor expression of students as a result of wrong concord, wrong use of tenses, poor use of prepositions and the inability to construct simple and correct sentences. Muodumogu and Ibrahim (2018) on the other hand believe that even though English Language is the language of instruction in the Nigerian educational system, its teaching to students for whom it is a second language continues to pose enormous challenges to teachers of the language teaching in Nigeria. The authors add that the major evidence of the spoor performance of teachers is the high failure rate of students in the school certificate examination for English Language and the inability of students to communicate properly using the language. The focus of the study therefore was to find out the extent to which the influence of mother tongue affects the teaching and learning performance of

teachers and students in English Language.

Consolidating the negative role of mother tongue interference on teachers' and students' performance in English Language, Iyere (2013) maintains that poor communication resulting from mother tongue interference is another problem that calls for urgent attention. This is because students' first language greatly influences the pronunciation and expressive skills of students in learning the second language. Iyere adds that Nigerian languages are tonal and syllable-timed, while English is a stressed-timed language and therefore, they have a great deal of differences that could affect both teachers and students' performance in the teaching and learning processes of English Language.

The concept of mother tongue is synonymous with Native Language (NL) and First language (L_1). Udu and Anzaa (2016) and Udu and Oyetunde (2021) believe that the mother tongue is a language that a child acquires at birth and it becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication. Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) describes the mother tongue as the language one learns first; the language one identifies with or is identified as a native by others; the language one knows best or a language one uses most. Children learn their first language from those who stay around them such as their mothers, parents, siblings or care-givers. Udu (2017a) argues that due to the mother's influence on the child, which is perceptively greater than any other person, the term 'mother language' or 'mother tongue' is used to refer to this first language universally.

Mother tongue is a transit language between the home and school. The school set up is noticeably different from the child's homes set up. Udu (2017a) affirms that mother tongue is not just a transit language, it is a language that helps children learn better. However, its competence could affect the teaching and learning performance of teachers and students in English Language.

Mother tongue influence in the teaching and learning of English Language pose difficulties to most teachers and students. Udu (2017 b) identified some topics in the senior secondary school English language curriculum that students find difficult to include vowel sounds, stress, intonation, transcription, pronoun-antecedent agreement, active and passive voice, affixation,

summary writing, punctuation and paragraphing. The difficulty is attributed to not only the influence of the first language but also how the topics are taught by most English Language teachers (Udu, 2017b). It can be argued that ineffective teaching of English Language could lead to ineffective learning and performance of among students in the subject.

Academic performance is a feedback on the effective and non-effective teaching and learning processes and inputs of teachers and students. Falode, Adewale, Ilobeneke, Folade and Robinson (2015) note that academic performance is an outcome of the experiences which one gains through exposure to education or other learning experience. The poor performance of students in English Language (WAEC, 2019) could be because of the poor learning experiences of teachers influenced by their knowledge of mother tongue resulting in their inability to effectively expose students to gain the goals of teaching English Language in secondary schools. Based on this assumption, this study focuses on investigating the extent to which the influence of mother affects the teaching and learning of English Language.

Empirical literature (Abel, 2023; Okechukwu & Owali, 2020; Aje, 2019); Abel (2023) found that mother tongue interference influences the learning and proficiency of English Language second learners. It was also revealed that teachers and students are hardly fluent in English Language because of mother tongue interference. The study also revealed that most of the English Language teachers are not qualified and they do not use research proven methods in teaching English Language. The study by Okechukwu and Owali (2020) on the other hand consolidates other findings that English teachers are aware of the existence of mother tongue interference in the learning and use of English as a second language. It was also revealed that the interference occurs at the lexical, syntactic, semantic and phonological levels of English and it constitutes an impediment to the effort of the second language users at attaining appreciable level of competence and performance in English Language. Aje (2019) who also researched on the influence of mother tongue interference in second language learning also found significant difference in phonological and orthographic

systems of students in English and Yoruba leading to linguistic interference in acquiring English. It was also found that students' mastery of English Language is affected by home and linguistic background.

Based on the influence of mother tongue on English as a second language, this study sought to examine the extent to which mother tongue would influence the teaching and learning performance of teachers and students in English Language in Makurdi, Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose for making English Language as the language of education in Nigeria from primary to tertiary institutions have not been adequately achieved. Most teachers and students of English as a second language do not speak English fluently. While some suffer from accent problems, others are far from being competent in the language. These weaknesses could have direct or indirect influence on the teaching and learning performance of Nigerian users (teachers and students) in the language. While the West African Examination Council Chief Examiner's report blamed these weaknesses on the influence of mother tongue (WAEC, 2019), other researchers blamed teachers' methodology and qualification. Based on the inconsistent report on students' performance in English Language, the problem of the study posed as question was, "What would be the influence of mother tongue on the teaching and learning of English Language?"

The following research questions and hypotheses were drawn from the problem statement.

Research Questions

1. To what extent would the influence of mother tongue affect the teaching of English Language by teachers of English as second language learners?
2. To what extent is the influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English Language as second language learners?

Hypotheses

1. Mother tongue has no significant influence on the teaching of English language by

teachers of English as second language learners.

2. Mother tongue has no significant influence on the learning performance of students in English language as second language learners.

Research Method

The study adopted an ex-post factor research design. A sample size of 22 respondents comprising two English teachers for senior secondary schools and 20 SS 2 students in Command Day Secondary School, NASME Barracks North Bank, Makurdi. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to determine

the sample size. Data were collected using influence of Mother Tongue Scale (IMTS) and Students' Performance Test in English (SPTE). While the IMTS was based on 20 item statements on mother tongue influences in the teaching of English, the instrument consisted of the modified four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree [SA] = 4, Agree [A] = 3, Disagree [D] = 2 and Strongly Disagree [SD] = 1. The SPTE was an adopted WASSCE questions on writing (50%), reading comprehension (20%), summary writing (30%) and 50 multiple choice questions based on SS 2 curriculum content. Regression statistics was used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent would the influence of mother tongue affect the teaching of English Language by teachers of English as second language learners?

Table 1: Model Summary for the Influence of Mother Tongue on the Teaching of English Language.

Model	N	R	R-Square	Adjusted R	Std. Errors
Teaching English Language	22	0.951	0.905	0.903	0.0080

Table 1 shows a regression model summary for the influence of mother tongue on the teaching of English Language. The value of R-Square is 0.905. This means that mother tongue have about

90.5% (0.905 x 100) variation on the teaching performance of teachers in English Language. This implies that the influence of mother tongue on the teaching of English language is very high.

Research Question Two: To what extent is the influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English Language as second language learners?

Table 2: Model Summary for Influence of Mother on the Learning Performance of Students in English Language

Model	N	R	R-Square	Adjusted R	Std. Errors
Learning English Language	22	0.829	0.688	0.681	1.8275

Table 2 shows a regression model summary for influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English Language. The value of R-Square is 0.688. This means that mother tongue has 68.8% (0.688 x 100) variation

on students' performance in English Language. This implies that the influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English Language is high.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant influence of mother tongue on the teaching of English Language by teachers of English as second language learners.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient for Mother Tongue Influence on the Teaching of English Language

Model Predictor	N	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig/P
Mother Tongue	22	4.923	0.230	0.951	21.392	

Table 3 shows t-calculated = 21.392 and p-value = 0.00. This means the p-value is less than the alpha level ($p < 0.05$). This implies that there is a significant influence of mother tongue on the teacher of English Language. This therefore means that the null hypotheses is rejected.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English language as second language learners.

Table 4: Regression Co-efficient for Influence of Mother Tongue on the Learning Performance of Students in English Language

Model Predictor	N	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig/P
Consistent Mother Tongue	22	5.668	2.807	0.951		
	22	4.890	0.475	0.829	10.287	0.000

Table 4 shows that t-calculate is = 10.287 and p-value = 0.00. Since the p-value is less than the alpha level ($p < 0.05$), the null hypotheses is rejected. This implies therefore that mother tongue has a significant influence on the learning performance of students in English Language.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings of this study was based on the analysis and interpretation of two research questions and the two hypotheses that guided the study.

The finding based on research question one and hypotheses one revealed a significant influence of mother tongue on the teaching of English Language. This means that the influence of mother tongue on the teaching of English Language is very high ($p < 0.05$). This may be because teachers' inability to be competent in the teaching of English Language is due to the disparity between their mother tongue and English Language at lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, phonological and morphological levels. These differences may have greatly affected the

competence and performance of English teachers as second language learners. This finding agrees with the report of Iyere (2013) that mother tongue is a tonal and syllable-timed language, while English is a stressed-timed language and therefore, could affect both teachers and students' performance in the teaching and learning processes in English Language.

The finding is also in consonance with Abel (2023) who found that mother-tongue interference influences the proficiency of English Language learners. As teachers are second language learners of English, and they transit from mother tongue into the English Language, they may have faced lots of difficulties teaching the subject and using the language for academic and social activities.

The finding according to the research question two and hypothesis two revealed a significant influence of mother tongue on the learning performance of students in English Language. This means that mother tongue has high influence on the learning of English Language among students. This may be because

mother tongue is the first language most students acquire at birth and it becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication. Learning a second language such as English which is noticeably different from the students' mother tongues could be difficult attaining proficiency in the language. This report validates the finding of Aja (2019) who found a significant influence of mother tongue (Yoruba) on students' performance in English Language due to their differences in phonological and orthographical systems of students in English and Yoruba leading to linguistic interference in acquiring English language.

The report of the finding is not different from the earlier report of Okechukwu and Owali (2020) who found that mother tongue interference in English Language and that the interference occurs at lexical, syntactic, semantic and phonological levels of English and these constitute impediments to the effort of the second language users at attaining appreciable level of competence and performance in English language. This means that mother tongue is one among other factors that significantly influence the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was therefore concluded that mother tongue is one among so many factors that influence the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigeria. Most times, teachers and students tend to refer to their first language (mother tongue) whenever they face difficulties teaching and learning English Language. It is therefore important that teachers and students are aware of these differences in order to seek for ways of attaining proficiency in English Language as language of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was therefore recommended that:

1. English Language teachers should highlight certain rules in L₁ that are not appropriate and cannot be used in English Language. This would ensure correct usage of English and decrease poor performance of teachers and students in the teaching and learning of English Language.
2. Nigerian teachers and students should be

aware of the standard of English Language so as to ensure quality in language education.

3. Benue State Ministry of Education should ensure that language teachers' capacity is ensured so that quality teaching and learning education delivery would be guaranteed.

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