

# MOTHER-TONGUE, HOME MOTIVATION AND PUPILS' PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN YALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which mother-tongue and home motivation influence pupil performance in English Language. It was hypothesized that: the use of mother-tongue at home is not significantly related to performance; parents' involvement in their children's learning is not significantly related to performance. A 28- item questionnaire was constructed to elicit responses from 250 primary three pupils in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State. The Pearson correlational statistics was used to test the hypotheses at .05 confidence level. It was found that significant correlation exists between mother-tongue and performance and between parents' interest and performance. It was therefore recommended that parents and government should encourage mother-tongue education; and that parents should also motivate their children by showing interest in their children's learning to elicit performance.

## **Introduction**

The significance of English Language in Nigeria cannot be overstressed in view of the premium placed on it. Although efforts are being made to come out with an indigenous lingua franca for Nigeria as a nation, for now, English Language is the medium of instruction. Indeed, the quality of students' certificate is determined by the result made in English Language. Also in view of the heterogeneous and multilingual nature of the Nigerian society, interethnic communication is done through the medium of English Language. Furthermore, the affairs of the National Assembly are conducted in English Language, likewise the judiciary in accordance with constitutional provisions.

This important position that the English Language enjoys in Nigeria is due to our colonial experience. When Britain colonized Nigeria, the outstanding problem she had to overcome was that of language, in view of the fact that the variety of languages in the country is close to infinity - every kilometer — another language" to borrow from a Nigerian musician, Edna Ogoli. To tackle this problem, the teaching of English Language was given priority in the curriculum of the schools established by the missionaries who, of course, were working in close collaboration with the colonial administrators. This move was to ensure administrative convenience (Chumbow, 1990).

For many years after the development above, English Language still occupies a position of prominence in the Nigerian school curriculum - a development which underscores the fact that the English Language cannot be ignored in Nigeria.

Any wonder then at Odumah's (1986:60) pessimism when he said: "English will continue to function as an educational lingua franca (at least in higher education for the present). It is also the official language and medium of interethnic and external communication". Sadly however, there has been a visible decline in students' performance in English Language examination. Effort by language teachers to improve students' performance in English Language has not yielded much dividend.

Most parents hold the teachers responsible for the poor performance of their wards in English Language. However, such parents forget that lack of motivation on their part and the background of the child's mother-tongue could be some factors contributing to a child's low performance in English Language.

## **The Problem**

The Nigerian national language policy recommends the use of mother-tongue as the language of instruction for the first three years of primary education during which period English will be taught as a school subject; while English will be used as a medium of instruction in the last three years of primary education, during which period the mother tongue will be taught as a school subject.

This implies that at the early age of six, the Nigerian child begins formal learning of two languages. This places the children in an awkward learning situation. The awkwardness of the

situation lies in the fact that, the Nigerian child who has developed a measure of familiarity with his mother-Tongue is now confronted with the task of learning a language that is alien to him on entering primary school. This problem was succinctly articulated by Fafunwa (1977) when he said:

...while some of the native speakers of English, French or what have you have problems in understanding their languages as dramatized in a popular book entitled *Why Johnny Can't Read and Write*, the African child has all of Johnny's linguistic problems plus his own, thus suffering from double jeopardy (p.7).

It is against this backdrop that the researcher sets out to investigate the influence of mother-tongue and home motivation on pupils' performance in English Language in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State.

## **The Study**

This study is designed to investigate the extent to which mother-tongue and home motivation influence pupils' performance in English Language. The fact that familiarity with language of learning expedites the process of learning does not lend itself to any form of equivocation. The six years primary project(SYPP) was necessitated "by the findings of the survey of English Language teaching in Nigeria in 1966. The conclusion of the survey was that:

...a major research should be mounted on a priority basis to explore under controlled, experimental conditions the question which needs answering before a decision can be made in Nigeria with regard to the most effective approach for the introduction and teaching of English in the primary school and its introduction as the medium of instruction (Bamgbose, 1984; P. 89).

As a follow up to this recommendation, a proposal was made to the Ford Foundation by the Institute of Education University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife to support this type of experiment. By the time another report was made to the Ford foundation on this question of relative effectiveness of media instruction, it has become clear that there was need to pay more serious attention, not only to English Language teaching (ELI), but also to the teaching of Yoruba, the pupils' first language, if any meaningful result were to be obtained.

Even before a child attains the age of going to school, the bulk of the things it learns is from its immediate environment - the home. The child learns from the mother, father, brother, sister or relatives living with its parents. If parents are adequately involved in the education of the child, there is every likelihood that the child will, in future, exhibit superior academic performance in English Language.

In support of the lasting influence of the home on the students' academic performance, Musgrove (1966) pointed out that "the claim which schools make concerning their impact upon children's 'character' is unfounded. The real prime and lasting influence is the home" (P.72).

In a related study Blanchard (1971) sampled third-grade boys of average intelligence drawn from working class and lower middle class backgrounds; controls were provided for the study in terms of age of the children. The research revealed that: "Boys whose fathers interacted frequently with (more than two hours a day) obtained higher grade than boys whose fathers were not in frequent interaction (Less than six hours a week)". P. 303.

Ogunlade (1973) carried out a research which covered two large urban cities in Western Nigeria. The result revealed that children from literate environment had a better academic achievement than those from illiterate homes.

The findings of Kallaghan (1977) based on a sample of children living in disadvantaged environment showed that home factors are more closely related to school attainment and intelligence.

Akpan (1987) carried out an extensive research on the influence of mother-tongue on the acquisition of English Language in secondary schools in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom state. One hundred and ninety-three (193) secondary school students, males and females, randomly selected from six secondary schools were used in the study. Based on the analysis of the data collected for the study, Akpan concluded as follows:

- (1) That there was no significant relationship between the level of mother tongue on the acquisition and use of English Language.
- (2) That there was a significant relationship between acquisition of English vocabulary and the use of English Language.

### **Methodology**

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study: i. There is no significant relationship between the use of mother-tongue at home and pupils' performance in English Language, ii. There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in their children's learning and pupils' performance in English Language.

The population for the study comprised of ninety-six primary schools in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State of Nigeria. Out of the 96 schools, there were nine thousand six hundred and eight primary three pupils.

The sample comprised often primary schools randomly selected from the ninety-six schools. Twenty-five primary three pupils were randomly selected from each of the ten sampled schools, amounting to two hundred and fifty pupils used as sampled subjects for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The Pupils Evaluation Scale (PES) was used to collect data for the study. In addition the promotion examination scores of the subjects in English Language for the 2001/2002 academic session (i.e. promotion from primary two to primary three). The PES was a 4-point Likert type questionnaire which used the following abbreviations:

SA	=	Strongly Agree	-	4 points
A	=	Agree	-	3 points
D	=	Disagree	-	2 points
SD	=	Strongly Disagree	-	1 point

For positive items measuring the variables, for negative items measuring the same variables the coding was done in the reverse ranging from SD (4 points) to SA (1 point). This instrument was submitted to experts for validation. Some items were either modified or omitted in the process. This ensures both face and content validities. The instrument is also deemed reliable because of the strong association amongst the items.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections - A and B. Section A sought information pertaining to name of respondent, Class, Sex and Age. Section B reflected items designed to measure the degree of use of mother-tongue and level of home motivation. The section was preceded by instruction for the respondent to read carefully and respond to the opinion of his/her most appropriate stand concerning each item, including the extent to which he/she agreed or disagreed.

### **Data Collection**

With the permission of the headteachers, classroom teachers helped the researcher in distributing the questionnaire (PES) to the subjects in each of the sampled schools to respond to. Wherever the subjects had problem, clarifications were made for purpose of proper understanding to elicit response.

Copies of the questionnaire reacted to by the subjects were coded for identification purpose and for the accurate recording of the promotion examination scores in English Language of each of the respondents. No time limit was specified for the filling of the questionnaire since it was not a test. However, the respondents were not allowed to discuss with one another. This measure was meant to avoid bandwagon effect on their responses. A hundred per cent return rate of the instrument was ensured because the questionnaires were retrieved on the spot by the researcher.

Data collected were analysed hypothesis-by-hypothesis. Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient  $r$  was used to analyse the hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

## Results

The findings of the study are as shown in Tables I and 11 respectively.

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between the use of mother-tongue at home and pupils' performance in English Language.

**Table I: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between the Use of**

Level of mother-tongue Usage at home (X)	98	687	488	.76
Level of performance in English Language (Y)	86	594		

### Mother-Tongue at Home and Performance in English Language

	<u>N =</u>	<b>250</b>		
<b>VARIABLE</b>	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma Y$		
		$\Sigma XY$		r
	$\Sigma Y^2$			

$P < .05$ ,  $df = 248$ , Critical  $r$ -value = .19

The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient  $r$  was used to test this hypothesis.

The sum of the squared deviations of the raw scores of mother-tongue usage at home and that of performance in English Language ( $\sum xy$ ) was 488. The sum of the squared deviations of the raw scores for mother-tongue usage ( $\sum x^2$ ) was 687 whereas that for performance in English Language ( $\sum y^2$ ) was 594. The obtained  $r$ -value was .76.

This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical  $r$ -value of .19 at .05 level with 248 degrees of freedom. The obtained  $r$ -value was greater than the critical  $r$ -value. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This result implies a significant relationship between the use of mother-tongue at home and pupils' performance in English Language. This phenomenon is reflected in Table I above.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in their children's learning and pupils' performance in English Language.

**Table II: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Parent**

	$\sum x$	$\sum y^2$		
<b>Involvement in Child Learning and Performance in English Language</b>				
	<b>N = 250</b>			
<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b><math>\sum x</math></b>	<b><math>\sum y^2</math></b>	<b><math>\sum xy</math></b>	<b>r</b>
Level of parental involvement In children's learning (X)	100	458	396	.92
Level of performance in English Language (Y)	84	398		

$P < .05$ ,  $df = 248$ , critical  $r$ -value = .19

The Pearson product moment correlation analytical approach was used to test the hypothesis.

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