

INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION ON PUPILS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN LOWER BASIC EDUCATION IN OJO LGA, LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

The researchers examined Influence of Language Instruction on Pupils Academic Performance in Lower Basic Education as survey research design type was used in this study while pupils from public primary schools formed Population of the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 Basic V pupils from 5 public primary schools in Ojo LGA, in Lagos State. The instrument titled, Influence of Language Instruction on Pupils Academic Performance in Lower Basic Education Questionnaire and English Language Achievement Test were used in data collection. These instruments were content validated as Split-half reliability method yielded 0.794 (Questionnaire) and 0.899 (English Test). Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to analyse data via Statistical Package for Social Science, Ver. 26.0 and hypotheses tested at 0.05 significant level. Findings revealed language remains a medium of instruction that influences pupils performance at the lower Basic Education. The study concluded language remains a fundamental medium of instruction and very critical determinant of pupils' academic performance, especially at the lower basic education level where foundational skills are developed. It recommends that mother tongue in early years be encouraged as teaching in pupils' first language helps them understand concepts more better, especially in foundational subjects.

Keywords: Language Instruction, Pupils, Academic Performance, Lower Basic Education, School Curriculum

Introduction

Language is a fundamental medium of instruction and a critical determinant of pupils' academic performance, especially at the lower basic education level where foundational skills are developed. At this stage, children acquire literacy and numeracy through the language of instruction, which significantly influences their comprehension, engagement, and ability to apply knowledge across subjects. According to Owo (2020), the effectiveness of instruction in early education largely depends on how well the language of instruction aligns with the pupils' linguistic background, shaping their confidence and performance in learning tasks.

The relationship between language instruction and academic achievement has become increasingly important in multilingual contexts, such as many African countries, where pupils often transition from home languages to English or other official languages in school. This transition poses both opportunities and challenges in facilitating effective learning. Alimi and Oyedele (2020) emphasized that inappropriate language policies and instructional practices can hinder comprehension, reduce participation, and negatively affect pupils' performance in reading and writing at the foundational level. Thus, the choice and method of language instruction are central to educational outcomes.

Studies have revealed that when pupils are taught in a familiar language, their academic performance

improves significantly because comprehension and expression are facilitated. Conversely, when the language of instruction is foreign to them, learning becomes mechanical and less meaningful. As Okoye and Abah (2020) pointed out, the mismatch between pupils' mother tongue and the language used in schools often results in poor literacy development, which later reflects in overall academic performance. This underscores the necessity for educational policies that balance mother tongue use with early exposure to the official language.

Moreover, language instruction is not only about the medium of teaching but also about the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers. Effective instructional approaches that integrate interactive teaching, code-switching, and contextualized learning have been found to improve pupils' retention and achievement. In their study, Adeyemi and Lawal (2020) demonstrated that language-based instructional strategies significantly enhance literacy skills, enabling pupils to perform better across all subjects at the lower basic level. This suggests that language instruction plays a cross-cutting role in shaping the totality of pupils' academic development.

Another crucial dimension is teacher proficiency in the language of instruction. Teachers who lack fluency or pedagogical skills in delivering lessons in the instructional language may inadvertently create barriers to learning. According to Musa and Ibrahim (2020), teachers' competency in language use determines the clarity of instruction, the level of pupils' engagement, and ultimately, academic performance. Therefore, strengthening teacher training on language pedagogy is vital to ensuring improved outcomes at the foundational education stage.

However, the global emphasis on inclusive and quality education as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 4 reinforces the importance of language instruction in shaping equitable learning opportunities. In contexts where pupils face linguistic disadvantages, there is a risk of widening achievement gaps. As Eze and Okafor (2020) observed, language instruction policies that consider the linguistic realities of pupils contribute to improved retention, comprehension, and performance in schools. Consequently, investigating the influence of language instruction on pupils' academic performance in lower basic education is critical for informing policies and practices that promote effective learning.

Statement of the Problem

In as much as stakeholders recognise the role and function of language as a tool for communication and learning, many pupils in lower basic education still continue to experience setbacks and difficulties in academic tasks which may have been attributed to challenges associated with language instruction. In a multilingual society like Nigeria, the language of instruction is often different from the pupils' mother tongue, thereby creating barriers to rapt comprehension and effective participation in class activities. This mismatch has been linked to poor literacy development, low performance in reading and writing, limited academic performance across subjects among others. However, inadequate teacher proficiency in the language of instruction, coupled with inconsistent policy implementation on the use of mother tongue or official language at the foundational level, exacerbates the problem. Consequently, as pupils struggle to grasp basic concepts, this often times leads to poor performance that hinders their educational progression. This situation underscores the need to investigate how language instruction influences pupils' academic performance in lower basic education, in order to identify effective strategies for enhancing learning outcomes.

Purpose of the study

This study investigated influence of language instruction on pupils academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools in Ojo LGA, Lagos State. Specific objectives in this study

includes to:

1. Justify how mismatch between pupils' mother tongue and language use affect pupils academic performance at the lower basic level education in public primary schools.
2. assess the influence of language instruction on pupils academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were designed to provide guide and direction for this work and tested at .05 level of significance.

H0₁: There is no significance influence of pupils' mother tongue and language used on academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools.

H0₂: There is no significant influence of language instruction on academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools

Methodology

Survey type of research design was used in this study as pupils public primary schools formed Population of the study. Simple random sampling technique was employed in the selection of 200 pupils from 5 public primary schools in Ojo LGA, in the state. An instrument titled, Influence of Language Instruction on Pupils Academic Performance in Lower Basic Education Questionnaire and English Language Achievement Test were used in data collection. These instruments were content validated as Split-half reliability method yielded 0.794 (Questionnaire) and 0.899 (English Test) meaning instruments are suitable for use. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to analyse data via Statistical Package for Social Science, SPSS ver. 26.0 and hypotheses tested at .05 level of significance.

Results

H0₁: There is no significance influence of pupils' mother tongue and language used on academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools.

Table 1: PPMC analysis showing influence of pupils' mother tongue and language used on academic performance of pupils in lower basic education

Variable	I	M	Σ	r	Rem
		e	I	-	ark
		a		c	
		n		a	
				l	
Mother tongue & Language use	2	3	2	.	Reje
	(	7	2	8	ct
Academic Performance	(	2	2	6	H0 ₁
		2	1	6	
		.	.		
		9	9		
		8	8		
Total	2				
	(				
	(				

Table 1 reveals that 200 pupils were involved in this study as mother tongue and language use

recorded the highest mean and standard deviation values of 3.72 and 2.22 as against academic performance with lower mean and standard deviation values at 2.98 and 1.98 respectively. With r-cal.value at .866, it means there exists a positively strong relationship between the variables. However at alpha value of .05, sig.value of .004 was obtained where $p < .05$ revealing that the null hypothesis is rejected.

H0₂: There is no significant influence of language instruction on academic performance in lower basic education in public primary schools

Table 2: PPMC analysis showing influence of language instruction on academic performance of pupils in lower basic education

Variables	N	M	S	r	Remar
		e	I	-	k
		a		c	
		n		l	
Language instruction	2	3	2		Reject
Academic performance	0	1	4	7	H0 ₂
	0	9	3	5	
		2	1		
		9	9		
		8	8		
Total	2				
	0				
	0				

Table 2 reveals that 200 pupils were involved in this study as language instruction recorded the highest mean and standard deviation values of 3.19 and 2.43 as against academic performance with lower mean and standard deviation values at 2.98 and 1.98 respectively. With r-cal.value at .799, it means there exists a positively strong relationship between the variables. However at alpha value of .05, sig.value of .001 was obtained where $p < .05$ revealing that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussions

The data from hypothesis one reveals that mother tongue and language of instruction significantly influence pupils' academic performance, particularly at the foundational levels of education. When pupils are taught in their first language, their comprehension and cognitive development improve, which in turn enhances performances across subjects. This findings of this study conforms with that of Bosah et al., (2025) who found a strong positive relationship between mother tongue instruction and pupils' academic achievement in basic science, emphasizing that learners construct knowledge more effectively in a familiar linguistic environment. Some of the languages used by teachers includes code-switching between mother tongue and second language which directly affects students' academic performance, particularly in English learning outcomes (Mwakira & Mwangi, 2021). Additional studies in Nigeria demonstrate that mother tongue can both facilitate understanding and, in some cases, interfere with second-language proficiency depending on how it is integrated into instruction (Ayofe & Funke, 2021; Akinlabi, 2021).

Also, data from hypothesis two revealed that language instruction significantly influence the

academic performance of lower basic education pupils in public primary schools. This implies that when instruction is delivered in a learner's mother tongue or a familiar language, pupils demonstrate improved comprehension, participation and overall achievement. The outcome of this study aligns with that of Eluowa, (2025) who affirmed that there exist a positively strong relationship between pupils' exposure to mother-tongue instruction and their academic performance, highlighting the effectiveness of using indigenous languages in early education as an influence variable. Learners taught using their first language tend to achieve higher test scores compared to those taught in a second language, due to reduced cognitive barriers (Bularon, 2025). However, some studies suggest that the effectiveness of language of instruction policies may depend on certain factors such as implementation quality and linguistic diversity.

Conclusion

The study concluded that language remains a fundamental medium of instruction and a critical determinant of pupils' academic performance, especially at the lower basic education level where foundational skills are developed. Language instruction policies also consider the linguistic realities of pupils contribution to improve retention, comprehension and performance in schools.

Recommendations

Among others the study recommended that:

1. The use of mother tongue in early years should be greatly encouraged as teaching in pupils' first language helps them understand concepts more easily, especially in foundational subjects like mathematics and sciences. Gradual transition to a second language (e.g. English) should follow once basic literacy is established.
2. The adoption of interactive teaching methods encourages discussion, storytelling, role-play and group activities instead of relying only on rote learning. Active use of language improves comprehension, vocabulary and critical thinking skills.
3. Teachers should be trained in effective language instruction techniques, including bilingual teaching strategies, phonics, and reading comprehension methods. Skilled teachers can better support diverse learners.

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