

# Comparative Analysis of the English Language Usage of Pupils in Public and Private Primary Schools in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the English language usage of pupils in public and private primary schools. The sample used for the study consisted of fifty (50) teachers from public primary schools and fifty (50) from private primary schools. A simple self developed questionnaire was used to get information from the respondents regarding the extent to which pupils in primary school use English. Three research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance during the study. The findings indicated that there was significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils in public and private schools to English at home; the usage of English language in teaching and learning in private and public schools; and the level of exposure to English language of pupils at school in public and private schools. The study, therefore recommended that government should make necessary review of language policy in order to make it workable in our primary schools. It should be noted that too much emphasis should not be placed on mother tongue education to the detriment of English and vice versa.

## Introduction

English language is the official language in many countries of the world including Nigeria. English language as a colonial legacy has been the country's official language since the exit of the British colonial masters' administration. It has assumed an exalted position not only as our lingua franca but also as the language of trade, education, judiciary, as well as language of the government and of instruction in our schools. Its importance in the educational sector and even in the labour market cannot be over emphasized. Thus, it is not an overstatement to assert that English is of great importance in Nigeria. Hence, it is more preferable to learn only English than to learn ten other languages, since with the knowledge of English one can communicate with virtually any part of the world (Ayeni, 1992). As important as English is, there is the need to always remember that it exists alongside many indigenous languages competing with it. This issue has contributed to much of the problems or challenges faced by its second language learners.

Much of the problems arising in the use of English and attitude towards its teaching and learning in a second language (L2) situation is traceable to the fact that English is not indigenous to the learners/users and teachers. In a situation like Nigeria, there are quite some factors (societal attitude, interference, motivation, family background, teacher, and the environment of learning among others) influencing the attitude of every individual towards the use of English. As observed by Kainuwa and Yusuf, (2013), learner's motivation towards language learning is mostly affected by his/her attitude. Learners of English are not motivated the same way to learn the language. For some, English learning may be viewed primarily as means of interaction with other language groups or with outside world. For others, it may be an instrument of success or personal development or exposure to new knowledge and ideas (Adejumobi, 2007).

## Use of English in Primary School

Language in educational system is very important as it is the vehicle of thought peculiar to human beings. Language is believed to be the key determinant of educational outcome. The foundation of educational attainment is laid in primary school and it is a known fact that when foundation is not solid the building is sure to be defective and when a building is defective, collapse is imminent. On this note, scholars, such as Fafunwa (1987), Emenanjo (1990), and Bamgbose (1991) among others, believe that mother tongue or language of immediate environment should be the medium of instruction for pupils in the formative years. Hence, the government stipulated a policy for primary education that recognizes the importance of both the mother tongue/language of immediate environment and the English language.

The Nigerian National policy on education (NPE, 1981) states thus:

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English

The policy has been geared towards the reinforcement of the mother tongue/language of immediate community. But the challenge being faced by the government, the relevant agencies and the Nigerian citizens has been how to effectively implement the policy in the face of the domineering role played by the English language. What operates in reality is that at the pre-primary school level English is used as the medium of instruction. This

happens most commonly in pre-primary schools which are privately owned. At this level, the government has not been able to control the language of instruction. On the other hand, in the public primary schools the mother tongue-medium policy is yet to be properly monitored and implemented for the lower primary classes as pronounced by the policy. Muslimi (1999) observes in a study that most public primary school teachers do not use mother tongue-medium alone. Most of the public primary schools use bilingual method as against the medium stipulated by the government in the language policy. Mother tongue and English are used to be inept thereby ensuing in a serious medium transition problem (Olaoye 2007). A critical look at the policy statement reveals that the policy does not state precisely when at the later stage the medium of instruction should move from the mother tongue to English. At present, we cannot really pinpoint the medium of instruction at the primary school level. All this is pointing to the fact remains that the government is yet to get more involved in the implementation and monitoring of the language policy.

As explained by Akindele and Adegbite (1992), a Nigerian learner does not feel the urgency to learn English since he already has his/her mother tongue to cater for his or /her immediate communication needs. In most cases, there is no smooth transition of the English language use from the home to the school. Thus, the L2 is totally new to the learner who is expected to learn the language and at the same time learn other subjects in it. He or she, therefore, ends up memorizing both the language and content of subjects without learning the means of understanding and expressing himself clearly in English.

Sometimes there may be derogatory comments from envious non-English speaking people or even frequent corrections from people who know the language better and are expecting the pupil to achieve a high proficiency in the language. Pupils affected by this attitude are usually scared and tend to end up not learning as expected. Apart from the fact that pupils' predisposition and attitude towards English learning can affect their language development, other agents of exposure like teachers and reinforcers have their own weaknesses in terms of lack of competence, experience and dedication to duty. All this determines pupils' attitude towards learning.

The teacher is supposed to be a model for the pupils. He or she is responsible to some extent for influencing their pupils' learning attitude. But it is important to note that teachers of English in Nigeria are Nigerians whose proficiency in English is often questionable. The teachers are also prone to errors because they themselves are non- native users of the language. Yet, the teacher should play the role of a model to his or her students or pupils particularly in language learning. One can then imagine the kind of model a L2 teacher is, who cannot produce some peculiar English sounds, articulate consonant clusters nor say whether a sentence is grammatical or not, or who cannot help speaking his or her mother tongue while teaching or interacting with his or her pupils (Adejumobi, 2007). To some teachers, it is virtually not possible to totally drop the use of their indigenous languages in which the pupils are also proficient when it comes to English teaching.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of the English language use in our primary schools has drawn so much attention from language scholars, government, educationists, parents and teachers among others. English being the language of instruction in Nigerian schools is very important in the educational system in Nigeria. However it is unfortunate that the level of performance in the language is very low. While the majority of students in Nigeria perform woefully in English, just a few perform well. This observation propels the investigation into the English language usage of pupils at primary school level. There is the need to revisit the background which is usually the primary school. On this note the study is set out to make a comparative analysis of the English language usage of pupils in private and public primary schools in order to bring to fore where the problems lie and also to give room for solutions.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils in public and private schools to English at home.
2. There is no significant difference between the usage of English language in teaching and learning in public and private schools.
3. There is no significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils to the English language at school in public and private primary schools.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive survey design was used for this study. Teachers of English language in public and private primary schools in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State constituted the population for this study while the samples which were randomly selected comprised fifty (50) teachers from public primary schools and fifty (50) in private primary schools.

The instrument used for this study was a self-developed questionnaire with Yes or No option. The instrument was validated by research experts whose corrections were strictly adhered to. The questionnaire was personally

administered by the researcher to enhance good responses from the respondents

### Data Analysis and Findings

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils in public and private schools to English at home.

**Table 1:** t-test statistics for level of pupils to English at home between public and private schools

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-table
Public	100	10.30	1.33	18	4.89	2.10
Private		13.20	1.32			

P<0.05 (Result is significant)

The result of analysis in table 1 revealed the mean and standard deviation of 10.30 and 1.33 respectively for the level of exposure of pupils in public school and the mean and standard deviation of 13.20 and 1.32 respectively for the level of exposure of pupils in private schools. The t-calculated (4.89) was found greater than the t-table (2.10) at 0.05 level of significance. This led to the rejection of the hypothesis which implies that there is significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils in public and private schools to English at home. The mean value of pupils from private primary schools was found greater than the mean value of pupils from public primary schools. Hence, pupils from private primary schools are more exposed to the English language at home than pupils from public primary schools.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the usage of English language in teaching and learning in public and private schools.

**Table 2:** t-test statistics for usage of English language between public and private schools

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-table
Public	100	33.80	1.99	18	5.52	2.10
Private		38.20	1.55			

P<0.05 (Result is significant)

The result of analysis in table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation of 33.80 and 1.99 respectively for usage of English language in public schools and mean and standard deviation of 38.20 and 1.55 respectively for the usage of English language in private primary schools. The t-cal (5.52) was found greater than the table value (2.10) at 0.05 level of significance. This led to the rejection of hypothesis 2. Hence, there is significant difference between the usage of English language in teaching and learning in private and public school. Private schools make more use of English language than public schools as revealed in the mean differences of private (38-20) and public (33-80).

### Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the level of exposure of pupils to English language at school in public and private schools.

**Table 3:** t-test statistics for level of exposure of pupils to English language at school in public and private schools.

Variable	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-table
Public	100	23.50	1.27	18	3.14	2.10
Private		25.00	0.82			

P<0.05 (Result is significant)

The result of analysis in table 3 revealed the mean and standard deviation of 23.50 and 1.27 respectively for level of exposure to English by public at school and the mean and standard deviation of 25.00 and 0.82 respectively for the level of exposure to English language by private at school. The t-calculated was found greater than the t-table which led to rejection of hypothesis. Hence, there is a significant difference between the level of exposure to English language to pupils at school in public and private school. The mean value of private (25.00) was found greater than the mean of public school (23.50) which implies that private schools are more exposed to English language at school than public schools.

### Discussion

The findings of this study show that pupils from private primary schools are more exposed to the English language at home than pupils from public primary schools. This seems to be pointing to the fact that private schools contain a larger proportion of children whose parents have characteristics that contribute to learning than do public schools. Although under the National Policy on Education, it is stated that in pre-primary education, the medium of instruction will be principally mother tongue or the language of immediate environment, most parents want their children to be taught in English (Omodiaogbe, 1991).

The findings also reveal that pupils from private schools make more use of the English language than public

schools. According to Muslimi (1999), most proprietors and teachers of private schools use the English medium and also encourage their pupils to speak the language. This stands to confirm the interest of most elite and literate parents in Nigeria. On the other hand, studies have shown that majority of the teachers in Nigerian public primary schools use the bilingual medium as they look for most comfortable and expedient approach of teaching. This explains the reason pupils from private schools are more exposed to the English language at school than public schools. Omojuwa (1983) in Akindele and Adegbite (2005) observed that many private primary schools are elite institutions attended by children of parents who wish that English be used as medium of instruction for their children.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that pupils who attend public primary schools are exposed to the use of English at a later stage of their primary education. Taking a critical look at this issue, Ojetunde (2012) opines that the pupils are likely to be handicapped because their level of proficiency in English at “the later stage” may not really help them to learn the language or be taught in it efficiently. Ocaik (2009) observed that most parents believe that a child’s communication skills and self-confidence in language use develops by early immersion to English. Such parents perceive English to be the language of upward movement and leads to the preference for English from as early as possible. Hence, they choose to be speaking English to their children at home and as well send them to school where English is purely used as the medium of instruction.

It has been a contentious issue as to when medium of instruction in primary school should change from the mother tongue to English. The situation at present is the fact that we cannot really pinpoint the medium of instruction in our primary schools. Therefore, it has been observed that in most of our public primary schools, pupils are subjected to a situation which Olaoye (2007) describes as “double tragedy” in the sense that pupils are not well grounded in the mother tongue neither are they sufficiently knowledgeable or literate in English.

In Nigeria today, majority of the proprietors of private schools compel their teachers to teach and communicate with the pupils in English while teachers in public schools are not compelled to use the mother tongue medium in the lower primary classes. Thus, most public primary school teachers resort to switching from mother tongue to English and vice versa. This has not really helped language development of the pupils concerned. Hence the study recommends the following:

- Government should make necessary review of language policy in order to make it workable in our primary schools. It should be noted that too much emphasis should not be placed on English to the detriment of mother tongue education and vice versa.
- Teachers should be encouraged to adhere to the mother tongue-medium policy. They should be well informed on when and how to effectively transit from the use of mother tongue to English.
- All stakeholders in education should be made to understand and appreciate the importance of mother tongue to children’s language development as this will foster effective education and literacy in Nigeria.
- There is the need for government and all other relevant agencies to enforce national language policy on education both in public and private primary schools.

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