

**MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:  
A CASE STUDY OF YORUBA ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS OF  
FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, YOLA, ADAMAWA STATE**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the interference issue in Yoruba English Bilingual context among the final year students of English Education of University of Maiduguri in affiliation with Federal College of Education Yola. The study was guided by three research objectives which include to; determine whether mother-tongue has any effect on academic performance of students of English Language; identify factors that can make mother tongue to have negative effects on students' academic performance; and also, to determine the factors that can minimize the mother tongue effects on academic performance. The study randomly sampled 100 Yoruba speaking students offering English Language in FCE Yola. The study used questionnaire to obtain data and analyzed the data using simple percentage, frequency and average. The study found that mother tongue affected academic performance of students in English Language. Also, the study indicated that factors leading to poor influence of mother tongue on students' academic performance are poor teaching methods, low parental educational background, peer group influences, lack of school facilities and over-population. Also, it was indicated in the study that the environment of learning, interest, appropriate educational technology, early child education as well as standard schools are factors that can be used to minimize mother tongue effects on students' performance in English Language. The study recommends that the governments should discourage the use of mother tongue to teach English Language. Also, government should ensure that the required learning facilities were provided promptly to all schools. The seminar, workshop and public awareness should be made to intimate the parents, students and teachers towards students' academic performance in English language

**Introduction**

Language interference results to either positive or negative impact on the language involved. The effect of Yoruba language on English language has negative and positive impacts. Sanusi (1996) opines that the negative effect is more than positive effects. The negative effect of it leads to making of mistake and committing of errors. Whatever that has advantage must have disadvantage. This point will be buttressed when we consider what Olabode (2013) quoting Gurrey, says he is of the opinion that, "if pupil's have been familiar to his mother-tongue with grammatical correctness, it will be easy to learn new language correctly". Due to the interference of mother tongue and as a result of those effects on L2, some students perform averagely while some perform poorly and still, some perform excellently

First language interference refers to mixing of the codes of first language with that of the target language (Oluwole, 2008). First language interference in English as L2 occurs through code mixing, code switching, lexical borrowing and semantic shifts (Ogunremi, 1992:52-53). The concept of interference is a psycho-linguistic concept which is a reality in language learning. Errors in second language learning are partly attributable to interference belief that acquisition of the first language usually affects performance in subsequent language acquired. Interference as a linguistic problem is common in communities where second languages (usually the lingua franca) must be learnt, in order word, interference is a term which refers to a situation whereby two different languages overlap

Adebayo (2012) says, “the most patent of these interference are phonological”. It means that the greatest areas where Yoruba language has affected English is at the phonological level. The lexico-semantic interference is cause by cultural differences between dominant and subordinate language. At this level, the entire culture is involved and because of the involvement of different cultural backgrounds there are areas of conflicts resulting in difficulties. In Nigeria for instance, it is acceptable to have several wives thereby making it possible to have names for the head wife, young wife, co-wife etc. in Nigerian context but not in British context

Syntactic problems as factors of interference involved the comparisons of the structure of two languages such as English and Yoruba with the aim of identifying area of difficulties. The syntax of English and Yoruba language have recognized problem areas as the nominal system (such as number, quantifier, Pronoun/gender, embedded structures relative pronoun complements) the verbal system (such as tense/aspect/modal) and the expression of passive.

At the grammatical level, there could be interference. Mother-Tongue obviously affects the learner’s understanding of grammatical rules of target language because the two are of different models. Grammatical Interference depends on the level of competence of bilingual involved. For instance, the level of competence of primary school pupils may be different from that of the secondary school students. The structure of the mother-tongue may be transferred into English especially in cases where English structures are problematic.

Mother-tongue interference results to either positive or negative and this has an impact on their academic performances. If students have been taught how to use their mother-tongue with grammatical corrections, they will be ready to learn how to use a new language correctly and that is their positive effects. Despite the interference of mother –tongue, some students perform excellently, some perform averagely and however, some perform poorly.

The theoretical framework for this study will be based on contrastive analysis theory propounded by Chomsky and analyzed by Sanusi (1996). He opines that, whenever the structure of a second or foreign language differs from that of the mother-tongue of the learners, we can expect both difficulty in learning and error in performance. However, where the structures of the two languages are similar, no difficulty is anticipated.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This research attempts to access the effects of mother-tongue on academic performance of 2018 final year students of Yoruba L1, English students of Federal College of Education Yola. The researcher discovered that most of these students only speak English language when they are in the school. Immediately they leave the school, it is their mother's language they speak, also, when they are with their friends outside the school premises. This interference of mother-tongue has caused a lot of problems to the students in their spoken and written forms of English Language.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to assess the effects of mother-tongue on academic performance of students of English Language i.e The 2018 final year students of Yoruba L1 – English students in Federal College of Education Yola. Secondly to see how mother tongue affects the spoken English of the Yoruba indigenous students that are studying English language

### **Research Hypotheses**

In carrying out a valid research and in testing the validity of a research, there is need to form hypothesis or questions.

- i. Does mother-tongue has any effect on academic performance of students of English Language?
- ii. What are the factors that can make mother tongue have negative effects on students' academic performance?
- iii. What are the factors that can minimize the mother tongue effects on academic performance?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research work will be of great importance to students, lecturers and those who wish to polish their English in order to reduce errors and mistakes being committed. Also, this work will be used to enable the educational policy makers in the school management identify the problems and challenges bedeviling the students of English Language.

### **Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

This scope of the study is limited to Yola North local government area of Adamawa state. It is limited to year 2018 final year students studying English/Yoruba language at Federal college of Education Yola. There are one hundred and twenty students in the department and all these students are selected.

### **Research Design**

The survey research design is used to assess and examine the effect of mother tongue on the academic performance of Yoruba indigenous students studying English i.e. N.C.E.2 – 3 students of Federal College of Education Yola, as their second language.

### **Study Population**

The population in this research comprised of N.C.E. 2–3 Yoruba indigenous students studying English in Federal College of Education Yola Adamawa State.

The total population is 100 students. The students were targeted because they were involved in the actual teaching and learning of English in the department.

### **Sample Size**

Random sampling technique was used for this study. The sample for the study is made up of 100 Yoruba indigenous students (from Yoruba and English Departments respectively) studying English in Federal College of Education, Yola. The study selected 50 students from each level (from N.C.E 2 – N.C.E 3) from the selected departments.

### **Research Instrument**

In this study, there is only one basic instrument that will be used in carrying out this research and it is questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the Researcher. Questionnaire is the basic instrument which will be given and distributed to the respondents to tick or answer the questions on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains 15 items, also the questionnaire is designed and drawn in a way that the respondents will understand it and give suitable response to the questions asked by the four point Likert scale of, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the respondents in order to avoid imposition of answers on the respondents by another respondent. The researcher administered questionnaire to the students and it was collected immediately from the respondents

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected will be analyzed by using simple percentage. The number of positive or negative responses will be analyzed. This will be in line with total number of the responses to determine the percentage (that is: number of responses x 100 divided by the total respondents x 1) of the validity and reliability of instruments before the questionnaire was used and administered.

### **Presentation of Results and Discussions**

This section deals with the presentation of results from analysis of the data obtained through administered questionnaires from selected Yoruba speaking English Students in FCE Yola. The presentation of results and discussion of findings were done in line with the study objectives.

### **Questionnaire Response Rate**

This study administered 100 questionnaires to the selected students at FCE, Yola. However, the total 95 questionnaires were retrieved which give 95% responses rate

**Bio-Data Analysis**

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 25	56	59%
26 – 30	29	30%
31 – 35	10	11%
35+	0	0%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	67	71%
Female	28	29%

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The result on Table 1 revealed the bio-data information of respondents. Results on age distribution showed that 59% of respondents were with ages less than 25 years. More so, 30% were those with ages within the range from 26 – 30 years, while the remaining 11% were those within age range from 31 – 35 years. These results showed that all ages category of students were duly represented in this study.

The results on gender distribution showed that most respondents (71%) were male while the remaining 29% were female. The dominance of male respondents male is not unconnected with the distance of FCE Yola which situated in Adamawa State in the North Eastern Part of Nigeria a 1000+ km distance to the south west. Thus, most parents may not allow a female student to go as far as such a longer distance for study, whereas, a male child may be allowed to further his study at any distance away from home.

**Analysis of Research Question**

**Research Question 1:** Is mother-tongue has any effect on academic performance of students of English Language

Table 2: Effect of Mother-tongue on Academic Performance of Students in English Language

S/n	Items	SA Fx (%)	A Fx (%)	D Fx (%)	SD Fx (%)	Avg	Rem
1	Mother tongue, (Yoruba) interfere with students pronunciation English words	26(27%)	45(47%)	22(23%)	2(2%)	3.0	A
2	The mode of spelling Yoruba words do interfere with the spelling of English Language	11(12%)	16(17%)	3(3%)	65(68%)	1.7	D
2	High mastery of mother tongue is leading to poor performance of students in English language	48(51%)	28(29%)	10(11%)	9(9%)	3.2	A
3	Too much of likeness of mother tongue lead to poor performance	45(47%)	34(36%)	12(13%)	4(4%)	3.3	A

SA: strongly Agree, A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree; Avg: average; Rmk: Remark; Fx: frequency; (%) percentages in the parenthesis

The results on Table 2 revealed the perspective of sampled Yoruba speaking students from Federal College of Education on effect of mother-tongue on academic performance of students in English Language. The results showed that 47% of students agreed that mother tongue, especially, Yoruba language do interfere with students pronunciation of English words (average =3.0). However, 65% of students strongly disagreed to the assertion that the mode of spelling of Yoruba words and alphabets is interfering with the spelling of English alphabets (average =1.7). Also, 51% of respondents expressed strongly that high mastery of mother tongue such as Yoruba is leading to poor performance of students in English language (average = 3.2). More so, 47% of students expressed strongly that too much of likeness of mother tongue is leading to poor performance in English Language (average = 3.3). The results from this research questions showed that the mother tongue such as Yoruba has negative effect on the students’ performance in English Language.

**Research Question 2:** What are the factors that can make mother tongue to has negative effects on students’ academic performance?

Table 3: Factors that can Influence Mother Tongue Negative Influence on Students Academic Performance

S/n	Items	SA Fx (%)	A Fx (%)	D Fx (%)	SD Fx (%)	Avg	Rmk
1	Poor method of teaching cause the effect of mother tongue on academic performance	42(44%)	31(33%)	11(12%)	11(12%)	3.1	A
2	Low educational background of parent can lead to negative effect of mother tongue on students’ performance in English language	23(24%)	48(51%)	19(20%)	5(5%)	2.9	A
3	Peer groups can influence mother tongue effect on student performance in English language	30(32%)	44(46%)	16(17%)	5(5%)	3.0	A
4	Lack of facilities in school can lead to negative influence of mother tongue on students’ performance in English Language	23(24%)	46(48%)	20(21%)	6(6%)	2.9	A
5	Over-population in the class can negatively influence mother tongue effect on students’ performance in English Language	39(41%)	36(38%)	14(15%)	6(6%)	3.1	A

SA: strongly Agree, A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree; Avg: average; Rmk: Remark; Fx: frequency; (%) percentages in the parenthesis

The results on Table 3 showed the respondents perceptions on the factors that can influence mother tongue to negatively influence students’ academic performance. The results showed that 44% of sampled Yoruba speaking students unanimously expressed that poor method of teaching cause the effect of mother tongue on academic performance in English language (average = 3.1). Also, 51% of sampled students expressed that low educational background of parent can lead to negative effect of mother tongue on students’ performance in English language (average =2.9). Likewise, 46% of respondents indicated peer groups as factor that can make mother tongue

negatively affect the students’ performance in English language (average = 3.0). More so, 48% of students expressed that lack of facilities in school can lead to negative influence of mother tongue on students’ performance in English Language (average = 2.9). Above all, 41% sampled Yoruba speaking students expressed that over-population in the class can negatively influence mother tongue affect students’ performance in English Language(average =3.1). These results showed that poor teaching methods from unqualified teachers, low parental educational background, peer group influences, lack of school facilities and over-population in classroom were all contributive factors leading to negatively effect of mother tongue on students’ academic environment.

**Research Question 3:** What are the factors that can minimize the mother tongue effects on academic performance?

Table 4: Factors that can minimize the Mother Tongue Effects on Students’ Academic Performance

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Avg	Rmk
		Fx (%)	Fx (%)	Fx (%)	Fx (%)		
1	Students that learn outside his/her community can experienced minimal mother tongue effects	22(23%)	35(37%)	33(35%)	5(5%)	2.8	A
2	Personal interest or career aspiration can minimize mother tongue effect on students’ academic performance in English	12(13%)	67(71%)	3(3%)	13(14%)	2.8	A
3	Using Audio-Visual technology teach English Language, can perfect lapses of mother tongue and enhanced students achievement in English	55(58%)	32(34%)	8(8%)	0(0%)	3.5	A
4	Students that had early education can bypassed challenges of mother tongue problem and perform better in English Language	44(46%)	38(40%)	10(11%)	3(3%)	3.3	A
5	Students that learn in the standard schools can experience minimal mother tongue effects on performance in English Language	68(72%)	16(17%)	3(3%)	8(8%)	3.5	A

SA: strongly Agree, A: Agree; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree; Avg: average; Rmk: Remark; Fx: frequency; (%) percentages in the parenthesis

The results on Table 4 revealed the factors that can minimize the mother tongue effects on students’ academic performance in English Language in FCE Yola. The results showed 37% of students expressed that whenever students studies outside his/her community, such a student can experience minimal mother tongue effects on his/her performance in English Language (average =2.8). More so, majority of students (71%) unanimously agreed that student with personal interest to learn good speaking English or as a result of strong career aspiration can have minimal mother tongue effect on his/her academic performance in English Language (average =2.8). Likewise, 58% of students expressed strongly that using Audio-Visual technology to teach English Language, can perfect lapses of mother tongue and enhanced students achievement in

English (average = 3.5). Also, 46% of sampled students strongly indicated that students that had early education can bypassed challenges of mother tongue problem and perform better in English Language (average =3.3). More so, majority of sampled Yoruba speaking students (72%) from FCE Yola unanimously expressed that those students that learn in the standard schools can experience minimal mother tongue effects on their performance in English Language (average =3.5). These results showed that environment of learning, personal interest or career aspiration, using appropriate educational technology such as Audio-Visual, early education as well as attending standard schools can minimal mother tongue effects on students' performance in English Language

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from this study showed mother tongue affected academic performance of students in English Language. Specifically, the results showed that Yoruba language do interfere with students' pronunciation of English words. Also, mastery of mother tongue such as Yoruba is leading to poor performance of students in English language. Likewise, too much of likeness of mother tongue is leading to poor performance in English Language.

This finding agreed with the earlier finding made by **Oluwole** (2008) that mother tongue negatively interfered with the reading habit of students in English Language. Likewise, the current finding agreed with that made by **Okeke** (2014), that mother tongue that negatively affected student academic performance in English language. This fact also concurred with the findings earlier made by **Okoro** (2010), **Onukaogu** and **Arua** (2009) and **Onukaogu** (2012) that even some English teachers in most secondary schools in Nigeria are found using mother tongue to teach English Language. Also, **Ivowi et al.** (2012) found that mother tongue influences the students' poor performance in English language in Junior School Certificate examination.

The findings from this study indicated that among the factors that lead to poor influence of mother tongue on students' academic performance are poor teaching methods from unqualified teachers, low parental educational background, peer group influences, lack of school facilities and over-population in classroom were all contributive factors leading to negatively effect of mother tongue students' academic environment. This concurred with the conclusion drawn by **Kolawole** (2009) that other factors such as poor method of teaching, lack of textbooks, language background and lack of professional growth and development of teachers, are factors that negatively influence mother tongue effects on academic achievement. Also, the findings by **Kolawole** and **Dele** (2012) revealed that there are other contributive factors that jointly negatively affect the student academic performance alongside the mother tongue are lack of instructional materials, lack of qualified teachers, poor parental education, lack of career aspiration as well poor school environment.

The findings from this study indicated that environment of learning, personal interest or career aspiration, using appropriate educational technology such as Audio-Visual, early child education as well as attending standard schools as factors that can be used to minimize mother tongue effects on students' performance in English Language. This agrees with the conclusion made by **Ohia** (2013) that among measure that could be



taken to enhance students' achievement in every aspect of English language irrespective of mother tongue are early ages education, parental involvement, learner environment and high socio-economic background. The findings from this study concurred with that made by Iroegbu (2009), that any parent with fair literacy level even only in the mother tongue will be sufficiently trained the children to adapt academic activities in the schools. Also, the finding by Kolawole (2008) showed that parents with higher literacy enhanced their children achievement in education irrespective of their mother tongues.

Above all, the findings from this study have established that mother tongue especially Yoruba Language has negative effect on the performance of students in academic. The reason being that most students attempt to understand English terms from Yoruba perceptively, while most used mother tongue for pronunciation of English word. This agreed with the conclusion drawn by Oglan (2009) that some Yoruba speaking students are having core-knowledge understanding as a result of using their mother tongue to understand every English language aspect. Also, Ogunsanwo (2008) argued that English construct are usually being interfered by highly desire of mother tongue among the students. Oguntuase (2006) maintained that where there is over-crowded classroom, the classroom management will suffer and majority of students used their mother tongue to communicate within the class without the knowledge of teacher. Likewise, Ohia (2013) argued that over-crowd classroom or lager classroom size is affecting lesson evaluation and teaching effectiveness. Also, the findings from study by Iroegbu (2009) indicated that the larger the size of the classroom the higher the poor control as well as poor lesson assessment.

### **Conclusion**

This study assesses the effects of mother-tongue on academic performance of students of English Language, especially the 2018 final year students of Yoruba L1 – English student in Yola Adamawa in Federal College of Education Yola. The study was guided by three research objectives which include to; determine whether mother-tongue has any effect on academic performance of students of English Language; identify factors that can make mother tongue have negative effects on students' academic performance; and also, to determine the factors that can minimize the mother tongue effects on academic performance. The study randomly sampled 100 Yoruba speaking students offering English Language in FCE Yola. The study used structured questionnaire to obtain data from respondents. The study recorded 95% returning rate. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, frequency count and average.

The results from analysis showed that mother tongue affected academic performance of students in English Language. That is, those students studying English are experience interference among the two languages – English and mother tongue (Yoruba).

Also, this study indicated that among the factors that lead to poor influence of mother tongue on students' academic performance are poor teaching methods, low parental educational background, peer group influences, lack of school facilities and over-population. More so, this study indicated that environment of learning, personal

interest or career aspiration, using appropriate educational technology such as Audio-Visual, early child education as well as attending standard schools as factors that can be used to minimize mother tongue effects on students' performance in English Language.

The sensitivity of language as a means of communication has made it necessary to examine the interferences between the students' mother tongue and English Language at among the Yoruba speaking students in College of Education, Yola. However, this study had showed that the students' mother tongue affected the student academic performance in English Language. This could be attributed to the fact that most study prefers using their mother tongue to give meaning for foreign terms. This affected the core-learning and limited the understanding of students.

Also, this study has demonstrated that there are others factors that jointly negatively influence on students' academic achievement alongside the mother tongue, which include poor teaching methods, lack of required teaching and learning facilities, poor students' attitude, over-crowded classroom as well as low parental educational background. However, this study has identified various factors that can be used to minimize the negative effect of mother tongue on the learning of English language, such measure include, good learning environment, uses of modern educational technology, parental commitment, high students career aspiration and standard school. Above all, this study showed that the problem of mother tongue interference is not unsolvable problem in academics, where other measures that can minimize the interference of mother tongue in teaching English Language were put in place.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following are the recommendations:

1. The governments through state and federal ministry of education as well as the school management should discourage the use of mother tongue to teach English Language.
2. Also, the government should ensure that the required learning facilities (on language) were provided promptly to all schools. In order to learn, teach and speak the indigenous and foreign language better
3. The parents, students and teachers should be aware of their importance in achieving good academic performance in English language irrespective of learners mother tongue. This could be achieved through seminar, workshop and public awareness in various schools.

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