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**A Comparative Study of Students' Academic  
Performance in English Language among Students in  
Select Urban and Rural Secondary Schools in  
Anambra State**

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**Abstract**

The research study aims to investigate and compare the academic performance of students in English language between urban and rural secondary schools in Anambra State. The education system in Nigeria faces numerous challenges and one significant aspect of concern is the disparity in academic achievements between urban and rural students. English language is a core subject in the Nigerian curriculum, and understanding the factors influencing student performance can provide valuable insights to improve educational outcomes. The study will employ a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of academic records with qualitative data gathered through standardized tests, questionnaires and interviews with students, teachers and school administrators. The sample will consist of a representative number of secondary

schools both urban and rural in Anambra State. The key objectives of the research are to assess and compare the overall academic performance of students in English language, identify potential differences in teaching methods and resources between urban and rural schools, explore socio-economic factors affecting student performance and examine the attitudes and perceptions of students towards the English language. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on educational disparities between urban and rural settings in Nigeria, specifically in Anambra State. The research outcomes can score as a basis for formulating evidence based policies and interventions aimed at improving English language education and fostering equitable academic opportunities for students across diverse geographical locations. In conclusion, this study seeks to shed light on the factors influencing students' academic performance in English language and provide actionable recommendations to address the disparities between urban and rural secondary schools in Anambra State, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of the overall education system in the region.

**Keywords: Comparative, Academic Performance, English Language, Urban and Rural**

## **Introduction**

Education in and outside the country has over these years geared up towards performance and achievements. Importance should be attached to the level of performance of students in urban and rural secondary schools in English language. It is often realised that the type of secondary purely on the basis of location can have a tremendous effect on student's level of performance in English language. This is more so, in a society like ours where English is the language of instruction in schools. English language is the language

of trade and accepted medium of communication in all facets of life. Findings of different scholars, Macebury and Jackline (1974) and Jeane (1979) seem to advance that location differences contribute to variation in academic performance while Archer and Mac (1979) advocate that students in rural perform better than students in urban areas in many subjects. So considering on the above controversies, the researcher seeks to find out whether there are significant differences between students in urban and rural area, between boys and girls in academic performance in English language.

Academic performance is the quality and quantity of knowledge, skills, techniques and positive attitudes, behaviour and philosophy that students achieve or acquire. The achievement is evaluated by the mark or grade that students attain in a term or education cycle. The quality of grades and the number of students that pass in the various grades determine the level of academic performance. Academic performance has become an index of student's future in this highly competitive world. There are many factors which account for the good or poor performance in secondary schools but it seems that the most important factor to the academic performance of students is the impact of location of schools on students' academic matters. It is therefore important to find out whether any significance difference exists between urban and rural secondary schools students performances in English language tests.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem under investigation is to examine and compare the academic performance of secondary school students in English language between urban and rural settings in Anambra State. Some linguistic factors that potentially inhibits excellence in English language and between male/female students in urban and rural

setting academic performance are language exposure, language variation, language instruction, cultural perceptions, socioeconomic status, teacher training and resources, peer influence. It is essential to conduct-in-depth research that considers the interplay of all these elements. As such, it is crucial to avoid oversimplification and recognize the diverse challenges faced by students in different settings.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

This paper explores the academic performance of senior secondary schools students in English language and find out whether location difference in English language performance exists among senior secondary schools students in Anambra State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- To access the overall academic performance of the students of select schools in English language tests
- To determine whether school location influences male and female students' academic performance in the English language.
- To find out whether gender difference contribute to poor students achievement in English language tests

### **Implications of the Study**

**Educational equity and access:** By comparing the academic performance of students in urban and rural secondary schools, the study can shed light on any discrepancies in access to quality education and resources. This information can help policy makers and educators identify areas of improvement to ensure that students in both urban and rural areas have equal opportunities to excel academically

**Policy formulation and implementation.** The findings can be used as evidence to develop targeted policies and interventions aimed at bridging the gap between urban and rural education. Policymakers can make informed decisions to allocate resources, improve infrastructure and implement effective teaching strategies to enhance English language education in both settings.

**Teacher training support:** Understanding the factors influencing students' academic performance in English can guide efforts in teacher training and professional development. Educators can be equipped with effective teaching methods and tools that cater to the unique needs of students in different environments, be it urban or rural.

**Curriculum adaptation:** The study may highlight variations in the English language curriculum delivery between urban and rural schools. This information can lead to the development of localized and contextually relevant curricula, which can engage students more effectively and improve their learning outcomes.

**Socio-economic implications:** Examining the differences in academic performance between urban and rural students can help identify socioeconomic factors that may be contributing to the disparities. This knowledge can influence policies that address socio-economic challenges and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Future research and studies:** The study can serve as a basis for further research and investigations into other subjects and educational aspects. It can encourage researchers to explore more deeply the reasons behind educational disparities and to find innovative solutions to improve overall education in urban and rural settings. Overall, this comparative study can provide valuable data and insights to inform evidence-based decision making in education, aiming to create a more equitable and effective learning

environment for all students in Anambra State, regardless of their geographical location.

### **Scope**

The study is on the location differential and academic performance in English Language in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Senior secondary SS 2 students of Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School Awka and Emeka Aghasili Secondary School Nise were used for the study. The content covered for the study were synonyms, use of articles, relative pronoun and verb forms.

## **Literature Review**

### **English Language**

A basic philosophy of teaching the English Language in Nigeria is that it is taught as a second language. Thus, English as a second Language (ESL) stands for philosophy of teaching and learning and use of English in Nigeria. As a discipline in school system, ESL should be planned as a subject and as a medium of instruction. This will be in complementary with the indigenous language (Adglure, 2009). The components of ESL discipline are practice of English language/ use of English (to acquire the knowledge and skills of the language), description of English Language (to learn about the language) i.e learning the rules and mental (language), and literature in English. First is the sequential bilingual approach which underlines the complementarities of the mother tongues and English as well as the relatedness of the skills acquired and learnt in both languages (Adegute, 2009). In this approach, the acquisition of mother tongue and learning of English should be sequenced in such a way that skills acquired earlier in both languages facilitated the acquisition of later skills for example, it has been shown (Adegbite, 2009) that:

- The knowledge of oral skills facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills in a language.
- The acquisition of literacy skill in L<sub>1</sub> facilitates the learning of literacy skills in L<sub>2</sub>

In this regard, the following proposal is made:

- That nursery education should emphasize oracy in the teaching of English Language
- That primary education should emphasize literacy in the L<sub>1</sub> and oracy of the L<sub>2</sub>
- That secondary education should consolidate literacy in L<sub>1</sub> and promote both oracy and literacy in L<sub>2</sub>

The second approach to the teaching of ESL is an integrated approach whereby instruction, exposure, practice and internal processing all interact to lead to the assimilation and accommodation necessary for spontaneity and fluency in a second language (Adegbite, 2009). Some others that may be relevant for different contexts of English language teaching & learning include grammar translation, audio-lingual, direct method, natural approach and task-based instruction (Cook, 2003). While studying of English language in Nigerian classroom, various differences in location performances in English Language has not been researched on. Hence, there is need to test the location differential and performance in English language in Nigerian secondary school.

### **Academic Performance**

The dictionary of psychology (Atkinson, Berne and Woodworth, 1988) defines performance as a specified level of proficiency in scholastic or academic work. According to Good (1976), the term performance is defined as “accomplishment or

proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge”. The knowledge attained or skills developed in school subjects are usually by teachers. Lent, Brown and Hackett (2000) see academic performance as key mechanism through which adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are important part of developing career aspirations. Although the literacy rate is more among girls than boys, it is quite interesting to observe that girls perform better than boys in almost all the academic examinations. The performance of every individual is not equal. There is a lot of variability dispersion

Academic performance is generally being considered as a key criterion to judge one’s total potentiality and capability in educational system. It occupies a very important place in the learning process. Crow and Crow (1969) defined academic achievement as “the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning, that is, achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him”. Academic achievements also denotes the knowledge attained and skill developed in the school subject, usually designated by test scores (Karthigeyan and Nirmala, 2012).

In any endeavour embarked upon by any natural being, be it a political programme, economic programme, social programme or an educational programme, there are a number of anticipated outcomes or results. In education programme, students are exposed to certain learning experiences and at the end, results are expected. Performance refers to the extent to which results are obtained in a given learning experience or activity (Mba&Udegbe, 2008). Performance is a product of learning whose level and permanence are affected by various conditions existing at the time of learning. Performance is a term used to indicate the degree of success attained in some general or specific area. Academic performance is the



outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals. According to Ward, Stoker and Murray (2006), academic performance are commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important-procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts.

Academic performance, however, is said to be a cumulative function of the current and prior family, community and school experiences (Roxkin, Hamishek&Kain, 2005). The implication of this position is that it is difficult to assess the relationship between student's academic performance and school input since data on family and community input in the process rarely exist. In the absence of paucity of these data, the education system and all over rely on available data inputs to determine students' academic performance. One major way the teacher follows in determining a students' academic performance is through tests. Tests are the technique for appraising individual performance in instruction (Olaitan and Ali, 2001). In the classroom context, the purpose of test are mainly to assess the performance of a specific group in specific content, of the set objectives and to provide adequate feedback and necessary guidance for counselling (Adewuji and Oluokun, 2001). Performance depends upon value judgement, opinions and standard. It is an act of accomplishing or furnishing something, something accomplished successfully especially by means of exertion, skill, practise or perseverance (Okafor, 2007). Though the definition of academic performance may vary among professionals in the field of academia, there is general consideration that it is a benchmark of academic progress. Disease control and prevention (2010) views academic performance from these perspectives. Academic performance (class grades, standard tests and graduation rates),

education behaviours (attendance, dropout rates, and behavioural problem at schools), students cognitive skills, and attitudes (concentration, memory and mood). People conception of educational achievement change with the times and are influenced by many factors. Academic performance is sometimes called proficiency or performance and may be quantified in several ways such as exams and tests.

### **Gender**

An examination of sex differences in academic performances in arts or sciences reveals controversial results. Although researchers begin to show interest in the problem at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is surprising that the results are inconsistent even to this day. Some researchers attribute the differences to methodological flaws, while others mention conditions that favour academic performance of boys and girls such as aversion of girls towards physical sciences and this could be responsible for the observed performance variations between the two groups. Iroegbu (2000) who did a study on the performance of science secondary schools found that boys performed significantly better than girls do and posited that there are things in learning process which affects the understanding of girls and boys differently.

Gender differences in performance have been examined for some time resulting in a substantial body of literature (Jack and Johannes 2001). The importance of examining performance in relation to gender is based primarily on the socio-cultural differences between girls and boys. Afonja (2002) defined gender as a socially constructed concept based on the assured power and position that a group of humans should possess. Jadesola (2002) also opined that gender is socially constructed for allocating powers,

duties responsibilities status and roles in any social context. Onwuamanam and Babatunder (2007), observed that gender stereotyping seems to promote the belief that women should be traditionally feminine and men are traditionally masculine.

Traditionally, girls in our society have been encouraged to conform, whereas boys are expected to be active and dominant risk-takers. Corroborating this view, Hassan and Ogunyemi (2008), acknowledge that most boys are provided with toys that enhance their usual-spatial ability such as trucks, Legos (toys consisting of plastic building blocks and other components) and model. Spencer (2004) also affirms that the girls are often highly structured requiring turn taking and rules. Thus, social expectations and conformity to pressures may create cultural blocks for girls.

In common students parlance of IQ grading, there exists terms such as ‘bright student’, ‘average student’ and ‘dull student’. The variability cannot be attributed to a single factor, but it is the outcome of number of factors as intelligence, study habits, self-concept, creativity, aptitude, interests, socio-economic factors etc.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The linguistic theory that anchors on this study is sociolinguistic. Sociolinguistics is the study of how language use is influenced by socio factors such as region, social class, ethnicity, gender and education level.

In the context of the proposed study, sociolinguistics could be a relevant theory because it examines how linguistics variations and social contexts affect language usage and performance. In this study, the researcher would explore how the linguistic environment in urban and rural areas of Anambra State impacts academic performance in English language. Some potential questions that could be explored within a sociolinguistic framework are. How does

the use of regional dialects or variations in English impact students performance in standardized English language assessments? Are there differences in language attitudes towards English between urban and rural students, and how do these attitudes influence their motivation to learn and excel in the language? Does the quality of English language instruction and resources differ between urban and rural secondary schools and how does this impact students' academic performance? Are there any significant correlations between students' socio-economic backgrounds and their English language performance in urban and rural areas. By using a sociolinguistic approach the researchers can gain insights into the complex relationship between language, social contact and academic performance, shedding light on potential factors that may contribute to any disparities observed between urban and rural students achievements in English language in Anambra State.

Many scholars worked on location as a general phenomena. Adeyemi (2010) investigated the "Effect of Location on Secondary School Students Achievement in Map Work in Geography." The purpose of the study was to discover ways of enhancing achievement in Geography. One hundred and sixty-four (164) students randomly drawn from SS II geography students in Ilesha East and West Local Government Areas of Osun took part in the study. Data were subjected to analysis using mean, scores, standard deviation. Result showed that there is a significant effect indicating that location has effect on students' achievement in Map Reading in Geography. Students in urban area tend to do better than those in rural area in Geography. This study is related to the present one in that the same class (SS2) and the Independent variables of location (urban or rural) were considered in both studies. However, the difference is in relation to achievement in map work, in Geography

and not in relation to performance in English considered in the present study.

Another study conducted by Ezenwosu and Nworgu (2013) was designed to investigate the efficacy of peer tutoring on student's achievement in Biology among students in selected urban and rural secondary schools in Anambra State. The study adopted quasi-experimental design. The population of the study comprised 1,731 SS II students. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the research questions. The results among others showed that students in urban area performed better than male students. Both studies are related in the design and class used as well as considering the location variable. They differed however, in the area of subject. Biology in the reviewed study and English in the present study. In this study therefore, the location of students may have significant effect on their academic performance in English.

Ebilade (2013) studied "The effectiveness of guided discovery method and location on student's achievement and interest in Basic Science concepts in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific purpose of the study was to find out the influence of location on students' achievement and interest in Basic Science concepts. The study adopted quasi-experimental design. The population of the study comprised 4235 JSS 3 students in the state. The study sampled two hundred and fifty (250) Junior Secondary School III (JSS III) students. The major findings of the study was that location has significant influence on students interest in the study of Basic Science concepts. Both studies considered the variables of location as such are related. The differences between the two are in the areas of subject and class. In this study, location may have significant effect on student's performance in English.

Ebiefie (2015) examined the "Effect of Age and Location on students' academic achievement and interest in Economics in some

selected secondary schools in Calabar municipality of Cross River State. The purpose of the study was to find out the relationship between students age, location and their interest in Economics. The population of the study consisted of all SS2 students in the secondary schools in Calabar municipality. The sample of the study was 120 senior secondary two (SSII) students selected from four secondary schools. Thirty (30) students were randomly selected from each of the four schools using simple random sampling technique. The design of the study was descriptive survey design. The result indicated that there is significant relationship and influence of age and location on students' interest in Economics. Both studies are related in the areas of same empirical class (SSII) and the location variable. However, they differed in the inclusion of age variable. In this study therefore, there may be relationship between location and students performance in English.

Okorie and Eze (2016) investigated the “Influence of Gender and location on students' achievement in Chemical Bonding” The purpose of the study was to find out if students' achievement in Chemical Bonding is a function of their gender and school location. Adopting purposive sampling techniques, nine schools were selected to draw 311 SSI students. Result of the study showed that mean achievement score of urban students was higher than that of the rural students hence, location as a main effect on students achievement in chemical bonding is significant. The reviewed study is related to the present one in location of school but they differed in the area of gender, subject and class. In the present study, there may be significant main effect of location on students academic achievement in English.

## **Methodology**

The target population of this study is 15,021 SS2 students in Awka South Local Government in 2021/2022 session (PPSM, Awka 2022) of this number males are 6521 while female 8500. The S.S 2 students are deliberately targeted because they have been exposed very well to English language studies.

The sample of the study 30 S.S 2 students were purposely selected from 2 schools that were used for the experiment. Two co-educational secondary schools were used. The schools are from the same local government area but one from urban and the other from rural. The samples are selected through purposive sampling technique.

The design of the study is qualitative and quantitative. Data were collected from two schools. One in rural area Emeka Aghasili Secondary School Nise, and Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School Awka from urban area. The content covered for the study were synonyms use of articles, relative pronoun and verb forms.

## **Descriptive and Empirical Results**

The instrument used for data collection is Abridged English Grammar Test (AEGT) adopted online from [www.english.test.net](http://www.english.test.net). The AEGT is a selection type multiple choice test comprising 60 question items with five answer choices/options (A-E). The selection type objectives tests allow students to select the answer from a given number of alternatives. The AEGT focuses on appropriate use of words of similar meaning (synonyms) articles, relative pronouns and verb present test. Each focal area has ten questions (that is total of 60 questions in all).

The data presented were the scores of the SS II students from the two schools. The scores were separated by comma.

Scores (X) = 21, 23, 15, 25, 25, 20, 25, 24, 20, 22, 26, 26, 25, 22, 18, 20, 22, 22, 23, 25, 18, 19, 22, 26, 20, 20, 19, 25, 18, 30

Variables		No of Students	School Location	Gender	Scores
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synonyms</li> <li>• Articles</li> <li>• Relative pronoun</li> <li>• Verb forms</li> </ul>	English performance scores	30	Urban 30,25,25,26,20,20,26,22,25,23,26,25,25,22,22	Girls	30,25,25,26,22,25,20,26,25
				Boys	26,25,22,22,23,20
			Rural 21,15,18,18,19,20,20,20,23,24,18,25,19,22,22	Girls	24,22,22,23,19,25,18,18,20,20
				Boys	15,18,19,20,21

The data were analysed using percentage. Percentage performance is obtained by summation of the mean scores obtained by the students divided by the total marks multiplied by hundred percent.

**How well did secondary school students perform in English language achievement test.**

The result revealed that the percentage performance of the students in English achievement test is 36.89% and it is less than 50% which means the performance of the students in English language was below average, generally the students achievement in English can be considered to be below average.



### **Influence of school location in students academic performance in English**

The academic performance of students in urban and rural schools in English is significantly different. Those in urban area percentage performance is 40% and that of rural is 33.7%. This implies that significant difference exists in the English academic performance of students in urban and rural areas. The students in urban area perform better than those in rural area.

### **Gender differential in the student's academic performance in English with respect to school location**

The academic percentage performance of female and male students in urban areas were 41.4% and 38% respectively. The percentage performance of girls in rural area is 35% and boys is 25%. This implies that there is significant difference in the English academic performance of female and male students in both rural and urban areas. Female students perform better than male students in both locations. The findings of this study are in line with that of a similar one by Adeyemi (2010) who widely reported that students perform below average. This findings are consistent with sociolinguistic theory which depicts that language usage and performance is affected by region (location) gender, social class and educational level.

In the overall, the academic performance of students in the urban area was higher than that of students rural schools. The analysis based on the locality of school revealed that statistically, there was a significant location difference in students academic achievements in English. The findings supported Okorie and Eze (2016) whose findings revealed that the academic achievement scores of urban students was higher than that of the rural students hence location as a main effect on students achievement.

## **Discussion of findings**

This study considered location difference in students' academic performance in English language in senior secondary schools in Anambra state, Nigeria. Based on the findings it is revealed that, the overall academic performance of the students in English is below average as measured by the percentage performance scores of the students (48.8%) in their academic performance in English language. The percentage performance score of female students is higher than the percentage performance score of male students in both rural and urban areas. The percentage performance scores of females in urban area and rural areas are 52% and 42% respectively. The analysis based on school location difference revealed that the students from urban area had a higher percentage performance score compare to students from rural area in academic performance in English. This gives an indication that students in urban perform better than students in rural in English language. This finding is consistent with that of Karthigeyan and Nimala (2012) whose findings revealed that students in urban areas performed better than students in rural areas. The finding is also in agreement with that of younger, Warrington and Williams (1999), Ching (2011) and Agarwal (1983) whose studies revealed that location difference exist and that females performed better than male students in English and reading ability.

Further findings based on location of the school in both urban and rural area showed that females have higher academic achievement in English language than males. A significant gender difference exists between males and females in their academic achievement in English language with respect to the school location. This finding is also in agreement with that of Karthigeyan and Nimala (2012), whose findings revealed that the academic performance of girls is higher than boys with respect to locality.

Ultimately, these findings are in agreement with sociolinguistic theory which posits that language usage and performance is affected by social contexts such as location or region, gender and educational level.

### **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, the academic performance of students in English falls below average, school location and gender differences in English language achievement exist. Similarly, academic achievement of females is higher than that of males with respect to location of school (urban and rural). Negative attitudes and behavior of the teacher, time wasting activities by male student, girls have more reading hours than boys, inadequate facilities, lack of satisfaction and motivation among the teachers, irregular attendance, low level of persistence, inferiority complexes among male students are all factors that increase gender differential in performance. It should be noted that no single factor could independently explain the factors that underlying to observe school location difference in performance but a host of variable interplay to bring out a true picture of school location differences in performance.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion the following recommendations are made;

1. **Quality Teacher Training:** Organize regular training programs for English language teachers to update their knowledge of teaching methodologies, language skills, and usage. Encourage teachers to participate in workshops, webinars, and conferences to stay updated on the latest trends in English language education.

2. **Interactive Teaching Methods:** Encourage teachers to use interactive and student-centered teaching methods. Incorporate activities such as group discussions, debates, role-plays, and presentations to make learning engaging and enjoyable.
3. **Reading Culture Promotion:** Foster a reading culture by establishing a school library with a diverse collection of age-appropriate English books. Encourage students to read regularly and organize reading competitions and book clubs.
4. **Language Laboratories:** Set up language labs equipped with audio-visual resources to improve listening and speaking skills. Students can practice pronunciation, listening comprehension, and oral communication in an interactive environment.
5. **Language Exchange Programs:** Facilitate language exchange programs between rural schools and urban schools or schools from other regions. This can help students practice English in real-life situations and enhance their communication skills.
6. **Digital Learning Tools:** Integrate technology into the classroom with the use of educational apps, language learning software, and online resources that can help students practice English language skills independently.
7. **Community Involvement:** Engage parents and the local community in supporting English language learning. Organize events, workshops, and seminars to raise awareness about the importance of English education and encourage community members to support students' language development.
8. **Peer Tutoring and Mentoring:** Implement peer tutoring and mentoring programs, where academically strong students

help their peers who are struggling with English language skills.

9. **Assessment and Feedback:** Regularly assess students' language proficiency and provide constructive feedback. Identify areas of improvement and offer personalized support to students who need extra assistance.
10. **Cultural Exchange and Language Immersion:** Organize cultural exchange programs where students can interact with native English speakers or visit regions where English is the primary language. Immersion experiences can significantly improve language skills.
11. **Teacher-Parent Collaboration:** Encourage open communication between teachers and parents to discuss students' progress, identify challenges, and jointly find solutions to improve their English language performance.
12. **Recognition and Incentives:** Acknowledge and reward students who excel in English language performance. This can motivate other students to work harder and improve their language skills.

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