

## Effects of Native Language on Students' Academic Performance in English in North – Eastern Nigerian Polytechnics

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### **Abstract**

*This study dwells on the effect of native language on students' academic performance in English language with a focus on North-Eastern Nigerian Federal Polytechnics. Namely, these include Federal Polytechnic, Bali, Kaltungo, Mubi, Damaturu and Bauchi precisely. The target participants of this study are students of National Diploma (ND) who have been taken English as general studies from some departments in the study area. Six departments are sampled using simple random sampling technique accordingly. The study intends to use a cross-sectional survey design and questionnaires as an instrument for data collection from the participants. A mixed method which involves both quantitative and qualitative are utilized for summary of data using descriptive statistics from the tables. On the other hand, qualitative data are put under the tables and follow with explanations. A judgement rule is drawn to decide significant findings and insignificant findings in the study. The Interlanguage Theory, proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972, is highly relevant to this study as it provides a framework for understanding how learners' native languages influence their second language acquisition, particularly in educational settings. The results find out that the use of native language have some negative effects on academic performance of the students in English language in Federal Polytechnics, under study. Therefore, the findings showcase that native language affects the participants' academic performance such as writing and speaking in English as a language of instruction. In response to that, some useful recommendations such as the teaching methodology should be interactive in English for a classroom rapport. That will motivate the students to participate more and improve their performance in the target language. In essence, this corresponds to a claim makes by Krashen who posits that once the adequate input is made available in a L2 class, the grammar will come up automatically. So, the results are useful for English language teachers, students, curriculum developers, young scholars and interested person or organization.*

**Keywords:** *English Language, Native Language, L2 Learners, Communicative Competence, Academic Performance*

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## Introduction

The rationale behind teaching and learning of English language in the Nigerian tertiary institutions such as polytechnics is to achieve communicative competence both in writing as well as in speaking. This is as a result of the numerous functions and status of English as language of instruction, official language, national language and many more in the world. In relation to that, this work sees the need to enunciate issues faced by the L2 learners in the study area in order to find out and address them so that the desired goals for learning the language to ascertain linguistic competence for effective communication will be achieved (Moses, Baba & Abubakar, 2018). In corroboration to that, the knowledge of linguistics demonstrates the cognitive ideas of language forms such as: phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Alo, 2003). Communicative competence was developed by Dell Hymes to describe, and account for, the knowledge that speakers and listeners have in order to communicate appropriately in different social contexts. It is a central notion in sociolinguistics and other socially oriented approaches to the study of language (Chomsky, 1965).

In a similar perspective, communicative competence refers to the ability to use language, or to communicate, in a culturally-appropriate manner in order to make meaning and accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interactions (Tarvin, 2014).

In relation to that, this study sees the communication competence as the ability to use a particular language according to its rules and regulations which permit an appropriate interaction to take place. In essence, the interaction here is limited to teaching and learning English language in polytechnics as L2 which is not disconnected to some issues such as using the L1 during and after the English classes. Most of the previous literatures couldn't address the problems of L1 which dominated the L2 (the English as language of instruction) in the study area and becomes a matter of concern but need to be addressed in this study.

However, there is need to undergo some processes for that to be done effectively. Some of these may include the steps involved in communicating with others. The L2 learners must have the necessary biological hardware which enable them to articulate the right sounds. There is also need for a brain to decide what to say and how to say it, by the participants. The students equally need the English complex enough to express any possible message. The participants of this study also need to have an idea on how to position the English words in the right order. Above all, the L2 learners have to be aware of the social setting in which they produce and understand the messages in English: There is also need for them to be aware of the knowledge and beliefs of other people, and have some idea of how they will interpret their utterances. The main focus of study is to investigate the effects of L1 of the participants on their academic performance in English due to the frequent use of the native language in their English classes and the study area. Therefore, most linguists assume language is the fundamental part of what it means to be human, and it is largely what sets us apart from other animals. Our technology in the polytechnics and the entire globe depend on it and so the students need the English language more than the native language (Harley, 2014).

Based on this ground, this study confirms that most of the previous investigations have only brought out native language as a facet affecting the performance of students in English but none of them focused on "Effect of Native Language on Students' Academic Performance in

English in Federal Polytechnics under study. Therefore, in this study, the researchers carry out research on the topic to fill the existing gap in the literature.

### **Statement of the problem**

It is raised up to the responsibility of a language teacher to assist L2 learners use English in real-life situations. The students must process and interact with English language which they have experienced during schooling days. This is in order to enable them succeed in any socio-cultural contexts in which they find themselves. For instance, in a classroom, workplace, or business arenas. If the students do not have access to English language, they have less opportunity and less power to interact as equal members of social interactions. So, so much dwelling on native language place them at disadvantage and this requires the linguistic knowledge of the target language to handle the interactional challenges presented to them. The issue here is directly connected to the academic performance of polytechnic students in English. In recent time, it has been deteriorating in Nigeria. The outcomes in the Federal Polytechnics showcase this deterioration. Take for example, English has been one of the major issues which the students of the polytechnics struggle with from the inception of the institution to date. The institutions are not less than 15 years old now except Kaltungo but English still remains one of the major problem of the participants owing to the frequent use of the native language which affects their academic performance.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the “Effects of Native Language on Students’ Academic Performance in English in Federal Polytechnics” through the following specific objectives. These include to:

- I.** The extent to which the students use of native language affect their academic performance in English.
- II.** The perception of students on the effect of native language on academic performance in English.
- III.** The perception of lecturers and students on the effects of native language on academic performance in English.
- IV.** The aspects of English that the native language affect during the process of learning by the students.

### **Research questions**

- I.** How often the students use of native language effects their academic performance in English ?
- II.** What is the perception of lecturers and students on the effect of native language on academic performance in English?
- III.** Which aspects of English that native language affect during the process of learning by the students?

### **Significance of the study**

This research supplies beneficial knowledge not only to all academics but also to curriculum developers of NBTE syllabus. Other government agencies that are directly connected to language education affairs in Nigeria is also not exceptional. The management of the institution where this study takes place as well as the language instructors, L2 students, parents and the polytechnic community at large will all benefit from this study. The input on the effects of use of native language in the Federal Polytechnics will not only be significant in the study area but also in Nigeria at large.

In a lighter note, the language instructions and the NBTE curriculum developers will be able to gain some useful knowledge which will assist them in decision making while trying to address issues related to language policy. This may involve effect of using native language in the polytechnics and how it affects academic performance of the students in English. More to that, other government agencies such as sister institutions, federal and state ministries will use it for their language education policy-making. Above all findings will also benefit many people such as teachers because it will improve their quality of teaching in such a way the students academic performance in English will be improved. The participants will equally benefit from it by noticing their weak points in term of interactions and written communication in English for a better academic performance. Parents will use the findings to encourage their children to use English for communication especially for official matters. In a nutshell, the research will contribute to the existing knowledge on the effects of using native academic performance of students in English in the polytechnic and further research is carried out as a replication.

## **Literature review**

### **Conceptual review**

#### **History of polytechnic education in Nigeria**

The history of modern education and, by implication, of modern technical education is rooted in the establishment of technical colleges and centres by missionary groups and the colonial government. The establishment of such institutions was, however, not aimed at producing engineers and other high-level technologists who might challenge or threaten the technical authority of the colonialists, but rather at the production of craftsmen, technicians and other technical aids that facilitated the execution of colonial works and the concomitant realisation of colonial objectives. Polytechnics are those technical educational institutions which offer variety of programmes and courses in various spheres of technology or human endeavour, ranging from fine and applied arts to engineering. The education offered by polytechnics is described as polytechnic education. Polytechnic education in Nigeria is said to have begun with the establishment of Yaba College of Technology in 1948. This was subsequently followed in 1958 by the Institute of Management and Technology and Kaduna Polytechnic. Between 1970 and 1979, twenty more polytechnics came into existence; and by the eighties, the number had gone up to twenty-eight (Obiako, 1989) cited in (Ukpai,2012).

Polytechnic education, which is part of technical education programme in tertiary education level leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as fundamental scientific knowledge. Initially, this type of education was aimed at evolving an educational system based on work and training (Ukpai,2008). Polytechnic educate future leaders and develop the middle-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Ekundayo and

Ajayi, 2009) and stressing further that, the main purpose and relevance of polytechnic education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation, making it an instrument of social change and economic development. Therefore, all these can only be achieved through the English language in the study area.

### **English Language**

The English language was born thanks to the Germanic invaders who came to the British Isles from what is now the northwest of Germany and the Netherlands, (badly called Holland) which is a mere province of this European kingdom), in addition to those of southern Denmark. At first, this language was composed of a set of dialects, among which the Western Saxon stood out. To him it was necessary to add other many and deep influences, coming, above all, from Scandinavian conquerors (in the north and east of England, where they constituted a Danelagh or Danelaw because their laws prevailed over the Anglo-Saxons). To these migrations must be added the Germanic and especially the Normans who came to Britain between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Hence, it can be assured that the current English is, in fact, a conglomerate of influences from Scandinavia and continental.

Europe. In particular, from France. All these migrations provacaron the extinction of the old Celtic languages and the Latin that was spoken in some cities (Mijwil,2018).

In any case, there are many more nations in which it is spoken. From North America to Oceania, through Africa and Asia. It is true that it is not official in many of these places, but the colonial past has made people of many nationalities and countries living irremediably in English. It should be noted that it is one of the official languages of the United Nations, Nigeria, as well as being a vehicle in the European Union and the International Olympic Committee. English is the first language with some 2,000 million native people or able to communicate in that language with some skill, almost a third of the world's population. Therefore, there is need for English among the students of the respective polytechnic much more than the native language. This helps them to have an insightful information about the language which will place them at advantage position in global business, education, technology, governance and politics. Above all, English is the official as well as the national language of Nigeria (Mijwil,2018).

### **Native Language**

Previous literature has been consulted. This is because it furnished the study with perceptions about native language and its consequence on English. Some of the studies performed across the globe which feed this study with relative procedures which assisted this research to be done in a better understanding manner. Studies on effect of mother tongue on performance of students in English fitted out an understanding on how native language cripples communicative competence of L2 learners of English in the polytechnic. A native language in the study area means a lot of things. Some of these include: Hausa, Yeroba, Igbo, Fulfulde, Mumuye, Jukun among other. So, native language could mean the first language of the students and it is also called mother tongue or L1.

Further highlight of previous literature entails that Adebayo (2008) uses a survey plan to examine the influence of mother tongue on performance of English language in Junior School

Certificate Examination in Western Nigeria. He concluded that mother tongue influences the students' performance in English language in Junior School Certificate Examination in Western Nigeria. Based on that, his recommendation is that English language is advised to be used as a tool for communication both within and outside the classroom. This is the proficiency level of the language for both lecturers and the students which will eventually hopes to boost the academic performance of the participants in English. Therefore, Adebayo (2008) did not only fail to address in his study the analyses of the extent to which mother tongue influences performance of English but also it's effect on academic performance of L2 learners. That is why this study comes into being.

### **L2 Learners of English Language**

Second Language Learners (SLL) refer to some people who study additional language to their mother tongue (L1) within a classroom situation such as in the polytechnic. In a broader note, L2 learning could involve a mixture of both learning and acquisition in a particular setting for some reasons or goal of learning. The scope of SLA includes informal L2 learning that and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first language. "Formal learning" occurs when a high school student in England living experiences, or when an adult immigrant from Ethiopia brought to the US and "picks up" English in the course of English. A combination of formal and informal learning takes place when a student from the USA takes Chinese language classes in Taipei or Beijing such additional language is called a second language (L2), even though it may actually be the third, fourth, or tenth to be acquired. It is also common that immigrants in Canada learn English as a result of interacting with native playing and attending school with native English-speaking children which takes place in naturalistic contexts, formal L2 learning that takes place in or out any specialized language instruction, or when an adult Guatemalan course in Arabic, or when an attorney in Colombia takes a night class in one as young children, and to the process of learning that language. Also, using Chinese outside of class for social interaction and daily circumstances is an example for "informal learning". The interaction resulted to language acquisition which is also a target language (TL). This refers to any language that is learned after the first language (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). So, in Nigeria the case is not exceptional because English is used as a national language, official language and language of instructions which is added to the L1 of the learners. Therefore, investigating the effect of native language on academic performance of students in English language remains one of the most significance of learning in the context of ELT in study area.

### **English language and polytechnic education nexus**

The place of English language in Nigerian Polytechnic Education in the era of globalization English language remains the main medium which other courses are taught in Nigerian tertiary institutions. To attain communicative competence the ESL learner needs to acquire the four skills, namely; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Adedaja (2013), opines that NBTE includes: the use of English and Communication skills into the polytechnic curriculum to enable students acquire necessary language and communication skills. No doubt, this is exactly why the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) includes Communication Skill and Use of English in the Polytechnic Education syllabus as courses to be studied all through the duration of some National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) program as:

OTM 101, OTM 315, GNS 101, 201, 301, 401 for first semester and OTM 222, OTM 422, GNS 102, 202, 302, 402 respectively for the second semester. The (2009) NBTE syllabus portray that “The Use of English course is intended to further improve the students' level of proficiency and competence in language use. It is designed to increase the students' ability to master and manipulate the various language skills of higher level.” This is to enable the Polytechnic ESL learners acquire necessary communicative competence and proficiency in the use of English language for specific purposes (ESP). The purpose is basically to enhance the polytechnic graduates’ interaction and functionality within the globalization process but the question is whether the objectives of teaching and learning of English language in the polytechnic have been achieved or not due to high rate of use of native language by the L2 learners (Moses, Baba & Abubakar,2018).

### **Communicative competence**

out comes of all of the above explanations is just to enable the students ascertain communicative competence in English language so that they can function properly in both academic performance and their future endeavours which the native language seems to impede. So, there is need for communicative competence which can be defined as the ability to use language, or to communicate, in a culturally-appropriate manner in order to make meaning and accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interactions. In essence, communicative competence “grammatical...knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology; sociolinguistic...knowledge of rules of language use; strategic...knowledge of strategies to overcome communicative problems; and, discourse...knowledge needed to participate in literacy activities” (Tarvin,2015; Hall & Doehler, 2011).

### **Empirical review**

Garba (2019) investigated the effects of Hausa, a native language in northeastern Nigeria, on students' academic performance in English at tertiary institutions. The study used a mixed-method approach, collecting data through surveys and focus group discussions with students from two polytechnics. Results indicated that interference from Hausa phonology and syntax negatively impacted students' writing and speaking proficiency in English, leading to lower academic performance. Garba recommended enhanced phonetic training to mitigate L1 interference but did not provide a comprehensive solution for non-Hausa students. While the study sheds light on phonological and syntactic interference, its limitation lies in the narrow scope focused solely on Hausa-speaking students, neglecting other native languages in the region.

Adewale and Yusuf (2020) explored the impact of Yoruba as a native language on students' English performance in polytechnics across Nigeria, focusing on southwestern institutions. Their findings suggested that Yoruba's tonal nature causes students to mispronounce English words, leading to reduced comprehension and poor academic outcomes. They employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-tests and post-tests to compare groups taught using bilingual methods and monolingual methods. While bilingual education improved performance, their study's limitation lies in its exclusive focus on Yoruba, ignoring how other native languages might differently affect English learning, particularly in non-southwestern contexts.

Baba (2021) examined the relationship between Kanuri, another native language in northeastern Nigeria, and students' performance in English at polytechnic institutions. Using a cross-sectional survey design, Baba analysed responses from 300 students in Yobe State, finding that Kanuri-speaking students struggled with English grammatical structures, which affected their academic writing. The study highlighted that L1 interference in sentence construction was a significant barrier to mastering English. However, a notable limitation was its reliance on self-reported data without direct assessment of English performance through objective tests or academic records, making it difficult to measure the actual impact.

The existing studies, while insightful, focus narrowly on single native languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Kanuri) and often rely on limited methods such as self-reports or regional case studies. The present study will fill these gaps by conducting a more comprehensive investigation of the effects of multiple native languages on English academic performance, using both qualitative and quantitative data, across polytechnics in northeastern Nigeria. This broader scope will provide a more inclusive and accurate picture of language interference in English learning across different linguistic groups.

### **Theoretical framework**

The Interlanguage Theory, proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972, is highly relevant to this study as it provides a framework for understanding how learners' native languages influence their second language acquisition, particularly in educational settings. The theory posits that second-language learners create a unique, evolving linguistic system that incorporates elements from both their native language (L1) and the target language (L2). This system, known as "interlanguage," is seen as transitional, gradually approximating the structure of the target language as learners receive more input and practice. In the context of northeastern Nigerian polytechnics, where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, this theory helps explain how native language interference may affect their academic performance in English. Interlanguage theory suggests that these students' English proficiency will not be purely standard but shaped by the grammatical, phonological, and syntactic influences of their native languages, impacting their academic outcomes. By anchoring the present study on this theory, the research will explore the extent to which interlanguage contributes to language challenges in English learning.

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for investigating and understanding existing conditions, relationships, opinions, and trends within the population under study. A descriptive survey seeks to provide an accurate depiction of the present situation, while also considering how past events or influences may have contributed to current conditions. This design is well-suited for examining ongoing processes, effects, and emerging patterns, offering insight into how various factors interact within a specific context. By focusing on the current state of affairs, the study aims to present a comprehensive understanding of the topic.



## **Population and Sample**

For this study, a simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure a fair and unbiased selection of participants. The sample comprised 30 academic staff members and 80 students drawn from five Federal Polytechnics, specifically located in Bali, Kaltungo, Mubi, Damaturu, and Bauchi. In total, 100 academic staff and 300 students were involved in the study, representing a diverse group across the selected institutions. The random sampling method ensured that all participants had an equal opportunity to be chosen, thus enhancing the credibility and generalizability of the results. This approach not only provided a comprehensive sample but also allowed the researcher to gather data from a wide range of perspectives, including both faculty and students. The combination of academic staff and students in the sample enabled a thorough investigation of the conditions and relationships within the educational institutions, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the research topic. By carefully selecting participants across multiple institutions, the study aimed to capture a broad spectrum of insights that would be applicable to the wider context of educational environments in similar settings.

## **Instrumentation and validity**

The survey questionnaire was designed to assess the effects of native language on students' performance in the selected Nigerian Polytechnics in northeast. The items were developed based on the research questions and literature related to native language effects. The demographic data such as gender, qualification, and position for both staff and students constituted the first section. Moreover, information for lecturers included institutional type, location, and years of experience were addressed. The subsequent section employed a five-point Likert scale with options from "Strongly Agree" (1) to "Strongly Disagree" (5), ensuring anonymity through assigned code numbers. The instrument was validated by experts from language and Linguistics as well as English department from Taraba State University, Jalingo. Therefore, The instrument's validity ensured through expert review, aligning the questionnaire items with the research objectives and relevant literature. The content validity was enhanced by tailoring the questions to accurately reflect the Effects of Native Language on Students' Academic Performance in English in North – Eastern Nigerian Polytechnics.

ensuring the instrument measured the intended variables effectively.

## **Instrument for data analysis**

For data analysis, the instrument utilized statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation to interpret the survey responses. The mean was used to determine the average response for each item on the Likert scale, while the standard deviation measured the variability of responses, providing insight into the consistency and spread of participants' opinions on the Effects of Native Language on Students' Academic Performance in English in North – Eastern Nigerian Polytechnics.

## **Judgement rule**

Any item with a response mean score below 3.0 will be deemed an insignificant finding, indicating a lack of consensus or relevance regarding the impact of that specific variable.

## Results and discussion

The survey section included five Likert-scale items, with the findings presented according to the study's research questions. Specifically, items 1 through 5 addressed the first research question: "To what extent do students' use of native language affect their academic performance in English?" Table 1 provides the mean scores and standard deviations for item 1. Lecturers strongly agreed that the use of native language affects students' English performance, as indicated by a mean score of 4.64 (SD = 53). Similarly, students agreed with this statement, reflected in a mean score of 4.38 (SD = 69).

For the second research question, both lecturers and students demonstrated agreement regarding the perception that the use of native language influences students' academic performance in English, though the responses varied. Lecturers reported a mean score of 3.78 with a standard deviation of 1.07, indicating moderate agreement on this issue. Students, however, showed slightly lower agreement, reflected in a mean score of 3.02 with a standard deviation of .97, suggesting a wider range of perspectives on the matter. These findings suggest that while both groups recognize the impact of native language use on English academic performance, there is some variability in the degree to which this influence is perceived, especially among the students. This dispersion of opinions highlights the complexity of the issue, pointing to the need for further exploration of how different factors related to native language use contribute to academic outcomes in English.

For the third research question, both lecturers and students indicated agreement that the primary aspects of English impacted by the use of students' native language during the learning process are speaking and writing. Lecturers reported a mean score of 4.26 with a standard deviation of 0.75, reflecting a strong consensus on this point. Students, while showing slightly lower agreement, had a mean score of 3.92 with a standard deviation of 0.77, indicating a broader range of views but still general agreement. These results suggest that both groups recognize speaking and writing as the most affected skills when students' native language plays a role in their English learning. The findings point to the challenges learners face in these areas, where native language interference may hinder their ability to fully grasp and apply English language conventions, particularly in oral and written communication. This highlights the importance of targeted instructional strategies to address these challenges and improve student outcomes in speaking and writing. Therefore, considering the judgement rule of this study which says that any item with a response mean score below 3.0 will be deemed an insignificant finding, indicating a lack of consensus or relevance regarding the impact of that specific variable and so only the items that ascertained mean score of 3.0 and above are considered as significant findings in this analysis.

In conclusion, the study revealed that the use of native language significantly affects students' academic performance in English, particularly in speaking and writing. Both lecturers and students agreed that native language interference hinders students' ability to excel in these core areas. The variability in student perceptions also suggests that individual experiences and language backgrounds play a role in shaping their views on this issue. These findings underscore the importance of addressing the impact of native language use on English learning to enhance overall academic performance.

## Recommendations

- I. Based on these results, it is recommended that schools implement language support programs designed to improve students' proficiency in English, particularly in speaking and writing.
- II. Teachers should receive training on bilingual teaching strategies to help mitigate the negative effects of native language interference.
- III. Additionally, incorporating more speaking and writing exercises in English within the curriculum can provide students with practical opportunities to strengthen these skills.
- IV. Finally, further research should explore the role of other factors, such as language exposure and socio-economic background, in shaping students' English language outcomes.

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