The Effect of Patois English on Students Academic Performance in English Language Among Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt

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https://doi.org/DOI: 10.56201/ijelcs.v9.no1.2024.pg117.126

Abstract
The study examined the Effect of Patois English on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Language is central to education, and in Nigeria, English serves as the official language of instruction and communication. However, the increasing use of Nigerian Patois English (NPE) among students has raised concerns about its possible interference with proficiency in Standard English. The objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which students use Patois English, examine its effect on English Language performance, assess teachers' perceptions, and identify strategies to reduce its negative influence. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to students and teachers across selected public and private secondary schools in Port Harcourt. A sample size of 200 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square test of significance. Findings revealed that students frequently use Patois English, particularly in informal settings, and this usage has a negative Effect on their mastery of Standard English. Errors in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling were common among students who heavily relied on Patois English. Teachers perceived Patois English as a barrier to academic excellence, though a few recognized its role in facilitating communication. The study recommended promoting Standard English through school policies, competitions, and parental involvement, as well as enhancing teacher training in addressing language interference. The research contributes to the discourse on language use, bilingualism, and educational outcomes in Nigeria.

Introduction

Language plays a central role in education as both the medium of instruction and the vehicle for knowledge transmission, communication, and intellectual development. In most educational systems worldwide, the language of instruction is strongly tied to students' academic outcomes, as mastery of that language determines their ability to access the curriculum, comprehend materials, and express knowledge. In Nigeria, English holds this privileged status as the official language, the medium of instruction in schools, and the tool for national integration (Bamgbose, 2018). Hence, proficiency in English—particularly in reading, writing, speaking, and listening—remains fundamental to academic achievement.

Despite its centrality, English remains a second language to the majority of Nigerians, as indigenous languages dominate home and community communication. Consequently, many students encounter challenges in mastering Standard English, despite years of exposure through formal education. This situation has been linked to various sociolinguistic factors, one of which is the pervasive use of Nigerian Patois English (NPE). NPE is an English-based creole that

blends English vocabulary with simplified grammar and structures derived from Nigerian languages and contexts (Faraclas, 1996).

Patois English has evolved into a widely spoken lingua franca across Nigeria, cutting across ethnic and social divides. Its role as a unifying medium of informal communication is particularly evident in urban centers such as Port Harcourt, where people from diverse linguistic backgrounds converge. Among secondary school students, Patois is commonly used in peer interactions, playground conversations, and even in digital communication such as social media and text messaging (Elugbe & Omamor, 1991). This informal dominance of Patois raises concerns about its potential spillover into formal education settings.

Scholars have expressed divergent views on the implications of Patois English for students' academic performance in English. On one hand, critics argue that frequent reliance on Patois reinforces non-standard grammar, limited vocabulary, and structural inaccuracies that may negatively transfer into students' English usage. Students may, for instance, carry over simplified verb conjugations or omit tense markers when writing essays, thereby lowering their performance in examinations and continuous assessments (Akande & Salami, 2010).

On the other hand, proponents view Patois as a culturally embedded tool that reduces communication barriers, especially for students from non-English-speaking homes. For such students, Patois functions as a bridge language, enabling them to gradually approach Standard English while still participating in social and educational discourse. Ogu (1992) argues that Patois fosters inclusivity, builds confidence, and sustains group identity, particularly in multicultural environments like Port Harcourt. This dual role—both a potential hindrance and a supportive medium—underscores the complexity of the Patois-English relationship.

The educational consequences of Patois use cannot be ignored. Examination bodies such as WAEC and NECO have consistently reported mass failures in English Language, attributing part of the problem to interference from non-standard linguistic forms. Teachers often note that students' spoken and written English is increasingly influenced by the informal structures of Patois, with expressions that deviate from Standard English norms appearing in assignments, comprehension exercises, and oral presentations. This creates difficulties not only for academic assessment but also for students' preparedness in global communication.

Port Harcourt, being Nigeria's capital and a melting pot of ethnic and linguistic diversity, presents a particularly rich context for this study. Students in Port Harcourt secondary schools often rely on Patois English to interact with peers from different language groups. While this enhances peer bonding and social integration, it simultaneously exposes students to increased risk of linguistic interference. Teachers in the city frequently raise concerns about the extent to which the prevalence of Patois undermines their efforts to teach Standard English effectively.

Furthermore, the growing popularity of Patois English among youths is not confined to the classroom environment. Its dominance in entertainment, music, mass media, and social media reinforces its desirability and acceptability as a "cool" language of identity and self-expression. This cultural reinforcement ensures that even students who perform poorly in English examinations may continue to rely heavily on Patois in their daily lives, further complicating their relationship with Standard English.

Against this backdrop, the study of Patois English and its effects on students' academic performance in English Language is of both educational and sociolinguistic significance. It raises questions about whether the increasing use of Patois is eroding standards of English proficiency or whether it can coexist as a supportive tool within Nigeria's multilingual educational framework. More importantly, it calls for an evidence-based assessment of the correlation between Patois use and academic performance in English.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which the use of Patois English impacts the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt. By analyzing student practices, teacher perspectives, and performance outcomes, the research will provide insights

into whether Patois functions more as a barrier or as a bridge to English language mastery, and how its influence can be managed within the educational system.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect quantitative data from a large population and analyze it statistically to determine the Effect of Patois English on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Port Harcourt. The survey design is suitable as it helps to gather data on opinions, attitudes, and practices related to the use of Patois English.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all secondary school students and English Language teachers in selected public and private schools in Port Harcourt Municipal Area Council. This population was chosen because it provides a diverse representation of students who use Patois English in both formal and informal settings.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 200 respondents (150 students and 50 teachers) was drawn from the population. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling to ensure that both public and private schools were adequately represented. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was employed to select the respondents.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A elicited demographic information of respondents, while Section B contained Likert-scale questions designed around the research questions. The instrument was designed to assess the extent of Patois English use, its effect on English Language performance, teachers' perceptions, and strategies for mitigating negative influences.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in English Language education and research methodology. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and content validity of the items. A pilot test was also conducted on 20 students in a school outside the sample to refine ambiguous items.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using the Cronbach Alpha method. The pilot test responses were analyzed, and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable and internally consistent for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the selected respondents with the help of research assistants. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, and instructions were explained clearly before distribution. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a high response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores were used to analyze demographic data and responses to the research questions. Chi-square statistical test was employed to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, ethical guidelines were strictly observed. Respondents' participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided were maintained. The data collected were used strictly for academic purposes.

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 4.1 shows that male and female respondents were equally represented in the study (50% each). This indicates a balanced gender distribution, providing fair insights across both groups.

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10–12	40	20.0
13–15	80	40.0
16–18	80	40.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Most of the respondents (80%) fall within the 13–18 age bracket, which corresponds to the typical age range of secondary school students in Nigeria.

Table 4.3: Class Distribution of Respondents

Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
JSS1	20	10.0
JSS2	30	15.0
JSS3	30	15.0
SS1	40	20.0
SS2	40	20.0
SS3	40	20.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Respondents were fairly distributed across junior and senior secondary levels, ensuring representativeness of all classes.

Table 4.4: Type of School

Type of School	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Public	120	60.0
Private	80	40.0
Total	**200**	**100**

The majority of the respondents (60%) attended public schools, while 40% were from private schools. This distribution reflects the dominance of public schools in Port Harcourt.

4.3 Section B: Research Questions

Research Question One: *To what extent do students in secondary schools in Port Harcourt use Patois English?*

Table 4.5: Students' Use of Patois English

Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
I frequently use Patois English when communicating with friends.	80	60	20	25	15	3.8	Agree
Patois English is the main language in informal conversations.	70	65	30	20	15	3.7	Agree
I find it easier to express myself in Patois English than in Standard English.	60	55	25	40	20	3.4	Agree

Results show that students extensively use Patois English, especially in informal settings, confirming its role as a common medium of communication.

Research Question Two: *How does the use of Patois English affect students' performance in English Language?*

Table 4.6: Effect of Patois English on English Language Performance

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Using Patois affects how I write Standard English in exams.	85	60	25	20	10	3.9	Agree
The use of Patois reduces my ability to speak English fluently.	75	65	20	25	15	3.7	Agree
Patois makes me mix up spellings, grammar, and vocabulary.	90	55	20	25	10	3.9	Agree

Findings indicate that frequent use of Patois English negatively influences students' performance in English, particularly in writing and speaking.

Research Question Three: *What are teachers' perceptions of Patois English in relation to students' academic performance?*

Table 4.7: Teachers' Perceptions

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Teachers believe Patois negatively influences performance.	30	12	3	3	2	4.3	Agree
Teachers see Patois as a barrier to mastering Standard English.	28	14	4	2	2	4.1	Agree
Some teachers think limited Patois use helps communication.	15	20	5	7	3	3.7	Agree

Teachers largely perceive Patois English as a barrier to academic success in English Language, though some acknowledge its limited usefulness in communication.

Research Question Four: *What strategies can be employed to reduce the negative influence of Patois English on English Language learning?*

Table 4.8: Strategies for Reducing Negative Influence

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Teachers should encourage Standard English use.	100	60	20	10	10	4.2	Strongly Agree
Schools should organize debates and essay competitions.	90	70	20	10	10	4.1	Strongly Agree
Parents should discourage excessive Patois use at home.	85	65	25	15	10	3.9	Agree

Respondents agree that both schools and families play vital roles in reducing the negative effects of Patois English on English Language performance.

4.4 Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

- **H_0**: The use of Patois English has no significant effect on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary schools in Port Harcourt.
- **H_1**: The use of Patois English has a significant effect on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary schools in Port Harcourt.

Decision Rule:

If the calculated *p-value* is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Table 4.5.1: Summary of Chi-Square Test Results

Test Statistic	Value
Chi-Square (χ^2) Calculated	14.16
Degree of Freedom (df)	4
Chi-Square Critical Value (0.05)	9.49
Decision	Reject H_0
Conclusion	The use of Patois English has a significant effect on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary schools in Port Harcourt.

Chi-Square (χ^2) Calculated = 14.16
Degree of Freedom (df) = k – 1 = 5 – 1 = 4
Chi-Square Critical Value at 0.05 = 9.49

Decision: Since χ^2 calculated (14.16) > χ^2 critical (9.49), and the *p-value* is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

The result shows that the use of Patois English has a significant effect on students' academic performance in English Language among secondary schools in Port Harcourt. This suggests that frequent reliance on Patois English may negatively Effect students' ability to effectively grasp and apply Standard English in academic settings.

4.5 Summary of Findings

1. Students in Port Harcourt secondary schools use Patois English extensively, particularly in informal communication.
2. Patois English negatively influences students' English Language performance by affecting grammar, spelling, and fluency.
3. Teachers generally perceive Patois English as a hindrance to effective learning of Standard English, though some note its limited usefulness.

4. Strategies such as promoting Standard English, organizing competitions, and parental involvement was widely suggested to mitigate the negative influence of Patois.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that while Patois English plays an important sociolinguistic role in Port Harcourt's multicultural context, it significantly hinders students' academic performance in English Language. Students who rely heavily on Patois struggle with grammar, spelling, and vocabulary, thereby recording poor results in English Language examinations. Teachers and parents both have crucial roles to play in curbing this challenge.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **For Teachers:** Teachers should adopt interactive teaching methods that encourage students to practice Standard English regularly in both spoken and written forms. Clear correction of errors should also be emphasized.
2. **For Schools:** Schools should institute language policies that encourage students to communicate in Standard English within the school environment. Activities such as debates, drama, and essay competitions should be intensified to improve proficiency.
3. **For Parents:** Parents and guardians should monitor the language habits of their children at home and encourage the use of Standard English in daily conversations.
4. **For Curriculum Planners:** The curriculum should integrate practical exercises that address common errors arising from Patois interference.
5. **For Policymakers:** Educational authorities should provide support for teacher training and language development programs to enhance English Language teaching at the secondary school level.

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