

## IMPACT OF TEACHERS' LINGUISTIC CHOICE ON LOWER BASIC PUPILS' READING COMPREHENSION IN ADO EKITI, EKITI STATE

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### Abstract

*The academic progress of a child could be significantly influenced by the linguistic choice of the teacher. The study therefore investigated the impact of teacher's linguistic choice on the learning outcomes of lower basic pupils in reading comprehension in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. The study adopted the pretest, post-test control group design. The population of the study consisted of all the lower basic pupils in public schools in Ado Metropolis. The sample of the study comprised 40 pupils who were selected through simple random sampling technique. An instrument titled Teacher's Language and Pupils' Academic Performance (TLPAP) was used to collect the data for the study. Experts in Language Education ensured the validity of the instrument. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest method was employed, and the Pearson Moment Correlation Method was utilized to analyze the results, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The findings of the study revealed that pupils in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group. Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore recommended that teachers should try and use language that could motivate the learners in the classroom.*

Keywords: Linguistic choice, Teachers, Reading Comprehension, Spoken English

### Introduction

Humans, as delicate creatures, can be easily influenced by the verbal behaviours of others. The spoken word possesses the potential to induce a variety of effects on an individual. Therefore, the phrases and statements utilized by teachers in their daily classroom interactions possess the power to either harm or motivate. Due to a growing number of pupils arriving at schools from broken families, with subpar nutritional habits and debilitating health concerns, and facing increased exposure to violence within their community, it is imperative for educators to be acutely aware of the impact their verbal behaviours have on children. Teachers must exercise mindfulness and select their words carefully when striving to enhance the self-esteem of each child (Moran, 2019).

Teachers are widely acknowledged as the driving force behind the cultivation

of young intellects, assuming an essential role in molding the forthcoming generation. Teachers are not mere purveyors of information; rather, they possess a distinctive amalgamation of attributes that contribute to their effectiveness within the educational realm and beyond. Obidike (2016) defines a teacher as an individual whose profession entails educating others, particularly children. Additionally, a teacher is an individual who imparts knowledge or offers activities, resources, and direction that foster learning in formal or informal settings. This view is not significantly dissimilar to that of Ighohno (2012), who perceives teachers as individuals who shape the moral fiber and identity of learners, while guiding them towards the appropriate path to achieve triumph.

English Language has long been acknowledged as a significant instrument in

preparing young individuals for academic achievement in Nigeria. It is crucial to acknowledge that each subject taught within the educational institution is encompassed by the framework of the English language system. However, if a child has limited exposure to English Language which is also the language of reading, their chances of succeeding in school might become increasingly unlikely. Children enter the educational environment with diverse linguistic backgrounds, already possessing a wealth of knowledge in a language that differs from the one used for classroom instruction. Regardless of their starting level within the school system, they are expected to gradually acquire a certain level of proficiency in the academic language.

In the Nigerian educational system, English language performs a crucial function as it acts as the conduit for instruction. Njoku (2017) posits that in the context of the Nigerian political system, English language functions as a secondary form of communication, given the diverse linguistic landscape of the nation. Furthermore, English serves as the medium through which education is delivered within the Nigerian academic system. It is not only utilized for instructional purposes, but also mandated as a core subject and a benchmark for assessing a student's academic progress.

Primary education holds great significance as it serves as the fundamental basis for subsequent educational tiers. It can be argued that teachers at this stage are entrusted not only with the responsibility of imparting knowledge but also with shaping the lives of their pupils, as the experiences they encounter during this period can either facilitate or hinder their educational trajectory in later years.

The efficacy of communication between teachers and pupils could have a direct impact on academic achievement. The linguistic choice of a teacher could either motivate or discourage learners'

participation in class which could advertently affect their overall academic performance. Linguistic choice as used in this study means how the type of language employed by teachers in the classroom affect the pupils mentally and psychologically which could in turn affect their overall academic performance.

Reading comprehension at the lower basic classes needs to be attended to meticulously. Teachers at this level are expected to be patient with the pupils since this level is considered the foundation for subsequent levels. Iroegbu (2017) notes that primary school pupils most especially those at the lower primary classes have the tendency of mispronunciation during reading comprehension classes. This indicate that pupils at this level need more encouragement and motivation. Lack of adequate motivation could significantly affect the academic performance of the pupils not only in reading comprehension but also in other subjects.

Teachers who employ language that is lucid, succinct, and comprehensible have the capacity to instigate active engagement in learning endeavours among their pupils. By utilizing vocabulary that is simplified and providing explanations that can be readily understood by young learners with limited proficiency levels, teachers promote participation rather than engendering feelings of being overwhelmed or frustrated (Başoğlu & Akpınar-Kaynaklı, 2020). A motivated classroom atmosphere cultivates heightened interest among students in acquiring the fundamental knowledge required for enhancing English language skills.

Moreover, effective teacher-pupil interaction is essential for the cultivation of strong reading comprehension skills in lower basic pupils. Teachers who employ appropriate language foster an environment that facilitates the accurate understanding of complex concepts by simplifying them for young learners (Ikegbu et al., 2019).

Clear instructions enable children to effortlessly follow lessons and enhance their ability to comprehend subjects beyond mere memorization.

Teachers who utilize precise and succinct language when conveying instructions or explanations establish atmosphere that is conducive to the acquisition of knowledge. A study conducted by Smith et al. (2017) discovered that effective communication by teachers significantly correlated with enhanced comprehension among students across a range of subjects. This result shows the importance of good communication skills among the teachers and learners.

Additionally, utilizing vocabulary that is easily comprehensible ensures that all learners grasp the concepts being taught, regardless of their linguistic background or level of proficiency (Jones & Lee, 2020). Instead of relying exclusively on technical terminology during instruction, simplifying intricate ideas encourages active engagement and facilitates participation from a diverse array of individuals.

The impact of appropriate language usage is crucial for building self-confidence among lower basic pupils. Teachers who utilize inclusive language practices that accommodate the diverse backgrounds and abilities of their students create an environment of safety, which in turn encourages students to freely express their thoughts without the fear of being criticized (Başoğlu & Akpınar-Kaynaklı, 2020). This heightened self-confidence not only enhances overall engagement in classroom activities, but also strengthens the development of English language proficiency.

Effective teacher-student interactions are of utmost importance in shaping academic success; thus, the significance of establishing a positive relationship between educators and pupils cannot be underestimated. According to the research findings of Anderson et al. (2019), students who perceive their instructors to be

warm and encouraging are more inclined to be motivated towards achieving higher academic goals.

Nurturing self-confidence among learners and promoting resilience in the face of academic challenges can be facilitated by utilizing constructive feedback rather than criticism. Smith et al (2018) carried out a study titled impact of teacher language on student's mindset and statistics performance. The objective of the investigation was to ascertain whether comments not related to feedback had the potential to impact students' mindsets and academic achievements. A total of 100 undergraduate students were included as participants in the research. The results indicated that students who were exposed to comments promoting growth demonstrated a greater inclination towards adopting growth mindsets compared to those who received comments endorsing fixed mindsets, consequently leading to higher scores in their quizzes. Furthermore, study suggests that non-verbal cues like smiling while speaking and maintaining eye contact can contribute to creating an environment where students feel heard and valued in the learning process.

In today's diverse classrooms, teachers must recognize and value the linguistic diversity of their students to create inclusive learning environments. The implementation of language practices that are culturally responsive serves to recognize the array of experiences and backgrounds present within a particular classroom. A study conducted by Hollis et al (2020) underscored the significance of incorporating multicultural literature into curricula as a means of encouraging authentic dialogue pertaining to various languages and cultures, thereby cultivating respect among learners hailing from diverse ethnicities.

Furthermore, by considering students' native languages as an asset instead of viewing them as obstacles, engagement levels can be significantly

heightened (Brown & Brown-Kramer, 2018). By esteeming multilingualism through the utilization of bilingual resources or the incorporation of translations when necessary, during instruction, teachers demonstrate inclusivity while simultaneously promoting equal access to education.

According to FGN (2013), the child shall be taught with the language of immediate environment in the first three years while English Language will be taught as a subject. subsequently, English Language will be used as the medium of instruction and still maintain its status as a school subject. English Language covers various aspects including reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary development, and grammar. However, it is important to note that in Ekiti State, the lower basic classes are structured in a way that each class has a teacher who teaches all subjects, and an assistant whose role is to support the main teacher in monitoring the pupils during class. This assistant is typically someone of lower academic level than the designated teacher.

Teachers are not solely tasked with imparting knowledge, but rather with facilitating, mentoring, and guiding their pupils. The linguistic methods employed by these educators play a pivotal role in shaping the academic achievements of their pupils. The lexicon utilized by these teachers holds the power to greatly influence their pupils' perspectives on both education and life as a whole. A teacher who incessantly nags may not be able to establish the same level of connection as one who meticulously selects their words when interacting with their pupils. Research has shown that the teacher's language has an impact on student's mindset (Smith et al 2018.)

It has been observed that many primary school pupils especially those in the lower basic classes who are expected to showcase a specific level of reading competence, still struggle to read

proficiently, particularly in government-operated public schools in Ekiti State. A pupil who lacks the ability to read proficiently could potentially face challenges in comprehending other academic subjects. Impaired reading abilities constitute one of the factors contributing to inadequate academic performance and social exclusion within the broader community (Asumang, 2020).

Poor reading skill exhibited by the pupils could also be attributed to many reasons ranging from the teacher's personality, method of teaching employed by the teacher to the lack of necessary reading and writing materials for the pupils' academic work. Ajayi (2024) posits that a significant number of schools suffer from inadequate infrastructure, including subpar buildings, facilities and equipment such as books, libraries, and instructional materials. Additionally, personal observation revealed that some pupils have a preference for certain teachers over others due to the way they are treated by their teachers. There have been instances where pupils have shown a lack of interest in school because they believe that their class teacher dislikes them.

In view of the aforementioned observations, a package titled Teachers' Language and Pupils' Academic Performance (TLPAP) was used to teach the pupils in the experimental group. This package foster inclusivity as each pupil was made to read a comprehension passage without any fear of being castigated by the teacher. The research assistants were told that their roles were that of facilitators and no negative language should be employed by them during the period of the experiment. During the reading lesson, the teachers wrote down the mistakes made by the pupils and corrected them using motivating words which in turn encouraged the pupils to read more. Other pupils in the class were not allowed to laugh at the errors committed by their mates. Instead, they were made to understand that errors are

inevitable and shouldn't be seen as the reason why another pupil should be laughed at. The Spoken English of the pupils were also given attention. Pupils were allowed to pronounce words without any fear of being laughed at. This was to ensure relaxation and freedom of participation by the pupils.

### Statement of the Problem

The foundation of education is established in the primary school, serving as the basis for subsequent levels of learning. Consequently, teachers at this educational stage bear a significant responsibility with regard to the knowledge they impart upon their young pupils. Reading, a fundamental skill of English instruction in primary school, encompasses word recognition, pronunciation, and comprehension. Proficiency in this skill serves as a crucial metric for evaluating both educators and educational institutions. Observation has revealed that a considerable number of primary school pupils in Ekiti State, particularly those attending public schools, continue to grapple with word identification and reading comprehension. The researcher personally observed that some teachers lack the requisite patience and hastily conclude that pupils who struggle to pronounce certain words during reading exercises lack the intellectual capacity to comprehend text. Regrettably, the choice of language employed by these teachers could detrimentally impact students' reading performance.

Furthermore, teachers are expected to foster a warm and supportive environment that enables students to feel at ease, considering the substantial amount of time they spend together. Regrettably, some primary school teachers have been observed not to create such environment for their learners in some primary schools in Ekiti State. The aforementioned problems have prompted the undertaking of this study.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the teachers' language use affect the academic performance of Ekiti State primary school pupils in reading comprehension and Spoken English. Specifically, it was to

- examine the homogeneity of pupils in the control and experimental groups.
- determine whether the choice of words employed by teachers have impact on the reading ability of the pupils.

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the pretest mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.
2. Teacher's language use does not significantly affect the learning outcomes of pupils in the experimental group.
3. There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.

### Significance of the Study

This research would provide significant advantages to teachers, as it would enhance their awareness of the influence their linguistic choices exert on their pupils. Furthermore, it would foster in individuals who struggle to accurately pronounce certain English sounds a recognition of the necessity to enhance their expertise in order to effectively instruct their pupils. Additionally, parents would reap benefits from this study, as they would witness the positive outcomes that result from employing suitable language when communicating with young children.

### Methodology

The study adopted the pretest, post-test control group design. Pretest was administered to determine the homogeneity of the pupils while posttest was used to

measure their learning outcomes. The population of the study consisted of all the lower basic pupils in public schools in Ado Metropolis. The sample of the study comprised 40 pupils who were selected through simple random sampling technique. An instrument titled Teacher's Language and Pupils' Academic Performance (TLPAP) was used to collect the data for the study. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A aimed to obtain information regarding the teachers' demographic variables, whereas section B encompassed 20 items. Experts in Language Education ensured the validity of the instrument. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest method was employed, and the Pearson Moment Correlation Method was utilized to analyze the results, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82.

The experimental procedure was in three stages.

**Stage I:** This is the pretreatment stage where pretest was administered to the pupils to determine their homogeneity. It was also at this stage that research assistants were trained on how to use package prepared for the study. This covered a period of 1 week

**Stage II:** This is the treatment stage where the treatment was administered to the pupils. This covered a period of 8 weeks. Research assistants who were also the class teachers of the pupils in the selected schools taught the pupils with the package provided for them. The package contained 8 reading topics. Each pupil was made to read part of a comprehension passage in a more relaxed and friendly way. During the reading exercise, the teachers noted down their mistakes which were all attended to at the end of the lesson. Also, the linguistic choice of the research assistants was that of encouragement and inclusivity. Speaking errors of the pupils were also pointed out and corrections were made using a mild and understanding language.

**Stage III:** This is the post treatment stage where posttest was administered on the pupils. This covered a period of 1 week.

The data collected from the study were analysed using inferential statistics. Hypotheses were tested using t test. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.

**Table 1: t-test showing significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.**

Groups	N	Mean	S. D	$t_{cal}$	Sig.
Control	20	51.20	7.49		
Experimental	20	51.25	6.51	0.023	0.982

$p > 0.05$  (Result Not Significant)

Table 1 showed that the  $t_{cal}$  (0.982) is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected, this implies that there is no significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.

**Hypothesis 2:** Teacher's language use does not significantly affect the learning outcomes of pupils in the experimental group.

**Table 2: t-test showing significant effect of teacher's language use on the learning outcomes of pupils in the experimental group.**

Groups	N	Mean	S. D	$t_{cal}$	Sig.
Experimental Pretest	20	51.25	6.51		
Experimental Posttest	20	73.20	6.22	10.893*	0.000

**P<0.05 (Significant Result)**

Table 2 showed that the  $t_{cal}$  (10.893\*) is significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not accepted, this implies that there is significant effect of teacher's language use on the learning outcomes of pupils in the experimental group.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.

**Table 3: t-test showing significant difference in the post-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.**

Groups	N	Mean	S. D	$t_{cal}$	Sig.
Control Posttest	20	53.75	7.11		
Experimental Posttest	20	73.20	6.22	9.199*	0.000

**P<0.05 (Significant Result)**

Table 3 showed that the  $t_{cal}$  (9.199\*) is significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not accepted, this implies that there is significant difference in the post-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups.

finding is in line with the finding of Anderson et al. (2019) who found that students who perceive their instructors to be warm and encouraging are more inclined to be motivated towards achieving higher academic goals.

## Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups. Both the control and experimental groups have moderate mean scores. This implies that the two groups are homogenous.

The finding also revealed that there is significant effect of teacher's linguistic choices on the learning outcomes of pupils in the experimental groups. This finding corroborates the finding of Smith et al. (2017) who discovered that effective communication by teachers significantly correlated with enhanced comprehension among students across a range of subjects.

The finding further revealed that there is significant difference in the post-test mean scores of pupils in the experimental and control groups. This

## Conclusion

It could be concluded from this study that there was a significant effect of teacher's linguistic choice on the learning outcomes of lower basic pupils in reading comprehension in Ado Ekiti.

## Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should be mindful of their linguistic choices in class.
2. Teachers who are still struggling to pronounce some words accurately should try and find a lasting solution to it in order to be able to teach the pupils effectively.
3. Teachers should be warm and approachable so that the pupils can feel at ease their class.

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