

**LANGUAGE AS A DETERMINANT OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING AMONG  
NIGERIAN CHILDREN: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AKWA IBOM STATE**

**BY**

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***ABSTRACT***

*The study investigated language as a determinant of effective learning among Nigerian children, with assessment of the Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study comprised all primary schools pupils in Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted survey research design, while simple randomly sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. The instrument for data collection which was tagged “Language and Effective Learning Questionnaire” (LELQ)” was administered to the respondents used for the study. The instrument was vetted by an expert in test and measurement before the reliability test was conducted with 30 students. The test produced the reliability coefficient of 0.91 and this proved the instrument to be reliable for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. It was observed that the highest barriers caused by language in Nigerian’ children was difficulty in comprehension. It was also observed that there is significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children. One of the recommendations was Government and school authorities should ensure that general language is used by the teachers while teaching and as well bring in mother tongues once in a while during ordinary discussion.*

**INTRODUCTION**

It is fascinating to see how in recent years educational experts around the globe have started to focus on the language dimension when it comes for schools to meet the demands of modern knowledge societies. According to Okoro (2004), Language is a system of intentional communication through sounds, signs (gestures) or symbols that are understandable to others. Theorists and researchers have applied a range of explanations to how the complex process of language acquisition develops in children, often coming to rather conflicting conclusions. The behaviorists view sees language as primarily influenced by external factors such as the modeling and reinforcement of parents, the innatist view of language development considers inborn factors to be the most important component, and the interactionist view of language development sees the interaction of innate predispositions to language and environmental influences as most important.

Language is a complex system involving a variety of components. Included are learning as well as understanding words, knowing the rules for using words accurately, learning the rules for putting words together meaningfully, and obtaining a growing grasp of the appropriateness of what is being communicated (Ase, 2004). Language and

communication is an important skill that allows a person to communicate. A child begins to develop language even before she can use words. Empirical results from large-scale international comparative studies have demonstrated beyond doubt that in many countries educational systems fall short of providing learning opportunities for all pupils to acquire, share and use knowledge for their own future well-being and for the ability to participate in public life, especially pupils who come from families with a migrant and/or below average educational background are often found to lack opportunities for attaining the needed competence in reading comprehension, (Short, and Fitzsimmons, 2007).

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the current educational problems of public interest is that of poor level of achievement caused by mother language which is different from the common language used in school. This poor level of achievement in many subject areas may be due to poor foundation in English language at the primary school level. There are also several research reports, which support the view that language inefficiency invariably leads to poor academic performance

The disparity between the amount of talk performed by teachers and pupils was often seen as an hindrance to learning. In addition to encouraging the development of speech for communication, teachers need to encourage talk which can be exploratory, tentative, used for thinking through problems, for discussing assigned tasks, and for clarifying thought: talk is not merely social and communicative; it is also a tool for learning which brings about better academic performance among pupils. Despite these concerns, however, the nature of teacher-student language in the classroom has remained largely the same. This study therefore seeks to assess language as the determinant of effective learning among Nigerian children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine language as the determinant of effective learning among Nigerian children. An assessment of the Akwa Ibom State experience. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the influence of language on effective learning and academic success of children.
2. To examine the barriers caused by language in children

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will be answered:

1. What is the influence of language on effective learning and academic success of children
2. What are the barriers caused by language in children

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following hypotheses are deemed necessary for this study:

1. There is no significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children.

## **Literature Review**

### **Influence of Language on Effective Learning and Academic Success in Children**

Language has been identified as one of the prominent factors of effective learning. Language used in teaching must be understandable or appreciable to every learner in order to bring about effective learning. Language at home is used for communication with friends or family members and can be a positive environment for learning (Ejeh, 2006). However, it is very different from language use in school. Language is used within pre-primary school education as the main tool for teaching. Children need to have proficient language skills in order to use their language to learn. Language is also used by teachers to manage their classrooms, determine rules and routines and ensure children are aware of their expectations. It is suggested in the current review of preprimary education that the ways in which teachers talk to children can influence learning, memory, understanding and the motivation to learn (FRN, 2004). It is also noted that there are enormous individual differences in language skills between children and therefore their ability to benefit from a particular level of instruction.

Language is a vital human phenomenon, it lives, changes and dies. Language is specifically a human expression. It is learned not inborn. Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades. Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school and so has remarkable impact on the learning success level of every child, (UNESCO,2008). On the other hand, experts have come to the conclusion that mastering the language of schooling is a key to successful learning across the curriculum and the hand, experts have come to the conclusion that mastering the language of schooling is a key to successful learning across the curriculum and the most reliable track to school success and elevated socio-economic status after graduating from school, (Zwiers, 2008). According to Bailey & Heritage (2008) and Scarcella (2008) it is helpful to distinguish four different patterns of language use or classroom varieties. They call them:

- Basic colloquial language (BCL)
- School Navigational Language (SNL)
- Curriculum Content Language (CCL)
- Essential Academic Language (EAL).

All of them serve different purposes: e.g. making pupils/students feel at ease (= BCL), organising work (= SNL), calling on subject-specific concepts and procedures in an unambiguous manner (= CCL), supporting the development and exchange of learning experiences and ideas according to the expectations of the discourse community of school teachers (= EAL).

Effective language skills are essential for children to access the curriculum. In the classroom; spoken language is the primary medium through which teachers teach and children learn (Tor-Anyiin, 2008). Language development is accepted as being critical to cognitive development and learning itself is seen by many as a social activity. For improved academic performance, it is expected that when a child starts primary school, they will be able to understand much of what is said, express themselves clearly, share

their feelings and make their needs known. In many ways, our ability to communicate defines us. It is one of the ways we are judged and measured by others and the means by which we forge our relationships, (Luis, 2012). Children starting school with speech, language, and communication needs may struggle with any aspects of communication and they can become withdrawn or present with challenging behavior within the primary school environment. Some children may not be able to understand the words being spoken to them and/or the grammatical rules of sentence construction. Therefore, when their teacher tells the class what they need to do, or explains a new idea or concept, they may struggle to understand what is being said.

### **Barriers Caused by Language in Children**

Writing on the effect of language on the academic success of a child, Tompson (2010), opined that there is so much language barrier to children in Nigeria. According to him, Nigeria has various languages such that a child who was brought up in Yoruba communities when relocating to any of Hausa speaking community will find it difficult to associate with his or her play mates in the new location and this has much negative effect on him as a child. According to EDK (2011), in the past, in many national contexts, school teachers based their daily routines on three “assumptions of normality”:

- (a) Society wants only a smaller proportion of a student cohort to qualify for professional (academic) careers.
- (b) Pupils are competent native speakers of the dominant language of schooling, and
- (c) They are used to the school’s particular patterns of language use since in their families reading and writing is a major concern.

Based on these three points of departure, schools delegated responsibility for language development to the specialists, i.e. teachers of language (L1) as a subject and to teachers of classical and modern languages (L2). The teaching of other subjects, however, focussed on subject-specific content and expected students to be able to face the linguistic challenges of subject teaching – if not, they simply did not qualify for academic advancement. Although this pedagogic “division of language labour” in school education is outdated because of various demographic and socio-cultural reasons, it has become a habitus in Bourdieu’s meaning of the term. According to Gogolin (1994) this case is still highly influential concerning deep rooted daily content teaching routines.

According to King (2009), language can help make or mar a child learning opportunities. As rightly said by him language can make it if the language used at home is indifferent from the language used in school where the child attends. For a child whose home language differs from that of the school, is bound to find it difficult to comprehend the school lesson received. As stated by Zwiers, (2008), expert have also made it quite clear that school is a discourse community with its own ways and means to use language as a medium or tool for making meaning, i.e. teaching and learning content across the curriculum. Thus, one of the major aims of the Council of Europe’s project “Languages in Education, Languages for Education” is to devise and support strategies and actions to battle the outdated Taylorism of language education in our school systems to such an extent that language awareness becomes a matter of course in content teaching across the curriculum for improvement of academic performance of the pupils. Following the

concern of experts worldwide for the specific patterns of language use in school education, the leading question for the conference was “What have we done so far and what can we do in the near future to support schools in developing and implementing whole-school policies of inclusive academic language education?”

### **Utilization of Language in Social Interaction Among Children**

The ability to understand and use language in a social context can cause significant problems with social interaction (Moore, 2008). Children may have difficulty knowing when and how to use their language in different social situations or knowing the differences in how to speak to adults or peers. Talk and social interaction among children play a key role in children’s social development and learning and it has been found that improving pragmatic language skills can help prevent problems in later educational performance. Spoken language pervades the pre-primary school environment and is the vehicle for most learning (Hallahan, 2003). It is crucial for development in pre-primary school children. On arrival at school, there is an expectation for children to listen to language from adults and peers, understand what is being said to them and respond with well structured, clean and appropriate sentences but allowing the mother tongue to be a barrier to them. It is important to acknowledge the importance of talk to support and extend children’s thinking and to advance their learning and understanding of all subjects.

Okon (2011) in his text emphasized that children are not only affected by the language used at home but also the one used in the communities since the child interaction is not only limited to the parents and siblings but is also extended to the community he finds himself. Writing in support of Okon (2011), Luis (2012) exerted that the language used by the community plays a very important role in every child with respect to his/her learning activities and learning experience. According to him some children are quick to adapt themselves to the new environment in language, culture and other wise while the rest hardly get themselves acquainted with the language, culture and other things which the community is identified with.

Scarcella, (2004) stated that this higher level of development enables children to transcend the immediate, to test abstract actions before they are employed and that this permits them to consider the consequences of actions before performing them. But most of all, according to him, language serves as a means of social interaction between people, allowing "the basis of a new and superior form of activity in children, distinguishing them from animals". The ability to use language to help solve problems is a tool. Rather than trying to understand the world alone, a child can enlist the help of older children, adults, or other authorities. As a result, Vygotsky (2005) believed that a child's potential should be measured not merely in terms of what a child already understands, but should include the child's capacity to profit from what others can help the child to understand.

### **Methods**

#### **Research design**

This study adopted a survey research design. This design was considered appropriate for the research as it attempted to check the already existing influence of the independent variable (learning activities) on the dependent variable (pupils’ performance).

**Area of the Study**

The area of study is Akwa Ibom State.

**Population of the Study**

The population of this study consisted of all primary schools pupils in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the pupils in all the primary school was 575,642.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample for this study consisted of 250 respondents who were obtained through simple random sampling technique where appropriate numbers of student were drawn proportionally from the population of each school.

**Instrumentation**

The first research instrument to be used by the researcher for this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was tagged "Language and Effective Learning Questionnaire (LELQ)" and was used to collect data on the independent variables presented in both sections A and B of the questionnaire.

**Validation of the Research Instrument**

The face validation of the research instrument was made by an expert in test and measurement.

**Reliability of the Instrument**

In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, test-retest reliability analysis was carried out on the research instrument, using 30 people who were not part of the main work. From the analysis, the reliability coefficient (0.91) was obtained and used to prove the instrument reliable for use in the work.

**Method of Data Analysis**

The data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis to test the hypotheses. The calculated values were compared with the critical values for significance of the result at 0.05 alpha levels.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Research Questions**

What are the barriers caused by language to the children

**TABLE 1: Percentage Analysis of the barriers caused by language to the Nigerian' Children.**

<b>PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS</b>			
<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>FRE Q</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Difficulty in Comprehension	121	48.4	1 <sup>st</sup> **
Limitation to Interaction/Association	69	27.6	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Inability to Solve Challenges	26	10.4	4 <sup>th</sup> *
Promotion of Low Self Esteem	34	13.6	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Total</b>	250	100	

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

• The least percentage frequency

From the result of the above table 1, it was observed that the highest barriers caused by language to the Nigerian' Children was Difficulty in Comprehension (48.4%), seconded by Limitation to Interaction/Association (27.6%). The third in the list was Promotion of Low Self Esteem (13.6%), while the least factor was Inability to Solve Challenges (10.4%).

**Hypothesis testing  
Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children. In order to test the hypothesis regression analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

**TABLE 2**

**Regression Analysis of the influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children.**

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.97a	0.95	0.95	0.43	0.95

**\*Significant at 0.05 level; df= 248; N= 250; critical R-value = 0.139**

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.97 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.5 alpha level with 248 degree of freedom. The R-Square value of 0.95 predicts 95% of the effect of language on **effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children**. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children. It was also deemed necessary to find out the extent of the variance of each case of independent variable (language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children.) as responded by each respondent (see table 2).

**TABLE 3**

**Analysis of variance of the influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children.**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Si g.
Regression	830.45	1	830.45	4444.80	.000b
Residual	46.34	248	0.19		
Total	876.78	249			

The above table presents the calculated F-value as (4444.80) and the P-value as (000). Being that the P-value (000) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children. The result therefore was in agreement with the research findings of (Ejeh, 2006) who claimed that language at home is used for communication with friends or family members and can be a positive environment for learning. The result also agrees with the findings of (FRN, 2004) who suggested that in the current review of preprimary education that the ways in which teachers talk to children can influence learning, memory, understanding and the motivation to learn. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

### **Conclusions**

There are various barriers caused by language to the Nigerian children. Such barriers are difficulty in comprehension, limitation to interaction/association, inability to solve challenges and promotion of low self esteem. There is significant influence of language on effective learning and academic success of the Nigerian children.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government and school authorities should ensure that general language is used by the teachers while teaching and as well bring in mother tongues once in a while during ordinary discussion.
2. Children from other tribes should learn the language of the host community fast in order to overcome the problem of language barriers in their learning.
3. Parents of the host community and the strangers should use English language most times to communicate with their wards and sometimes their local languages to communicate too in order to help eliminate language barriers.



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