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## A Critical Assessment of Language and Effective Learning of Nigerian the Nigerian Children

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### ABSTRACT

*This study sought to examine the influence of language on effective learning of the Nigeria children. The study adopted an Expost facto research design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study comprised head teachers and teachers teaching English language in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 100 head teachers and 100 teachers teaching English language, thus, giving a sample size of 200 respondents for the study. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled "Language and Effective Learning Questionnaire (LELQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, completeness and the language of the study under consideration. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.79 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and simple regression. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. The study concluded among others, that there that there is significant influence of language on effective learning among students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The study recommended amongst others that language should be important to all manners of transmission of knowledge, values and socialization developments for effective learning of the Nigerian children.*

**KEYWORDS: Language, Effective Learning and Children**

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### Introduction

Language of instruction in schools is a very crucial one and often controversial in many parts of the world especially in developing countries. It is even more complex in previously colonized multilingual countries where the official colonial language is different from the indigenous languages. Once the concepts of language are learnt, they can easily be reapplied to an education stream. Awoniyi cited in Owu-Ewie (2006), defined mother tongue

(MT) as the language which a group of people considered to be inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually become their natural instrument of thoughts and communication. MT is the first language that a person learnt. Thus, a person may be described as a native speaker of the first language, although he/she may also be a native speaker of more than one language if all of the languages were learnt without formal education, such as through cultural immersion before puberty.

It is generally accepted that in learning process, the mother tongue (MT) of the learner is of highest importance. One of the linguistic problems of public interest in education is the use of foreign language in teaching. Language is an important factor that promotes student's effective learning at the formal and informal settings. Araromi (2005) noted that language is the medium of communication, however, without it human beings would have difficulty to exist. The education sector is one of the areas that share in the crisis of language choice.

According to Tang (2002), the acquisition of language by the students allows them to become more aware of the similarities and differences between cultures and linguistic structures. Similarly, any child who is unable to speak any of the languages is tagged by the family members or members of the community as a dummy or less human, despite the fact that the child may be proficient in sign language. From all indications, the stigmatization of students with language barrier negatively impacts their learning outcomes. Now, more and more students prefer to study abroad. Along other challenges of international travel, language barrier has become one of the greatest problems for international students, especially in America. Much research exists that shows the difficulties imposed by language barriers for these students, including helplessness and excess stress (Tang, 2002). Selvadurai in Tang (2002) mentioned the issues of language barriers, of all the factors; he said that language is the first barrier encountered by international students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most Nigerian students are being short-changed by the school system. Most school students don't have the opportunity to learn how to communicate effectively in their own language due to excessive exposure to English language. Ibibio language dominates most public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, it is not surprising to see pupils from other tribes and states in these public schools experiencing social isolation, prejudice, and discrimination, because of the lack of language proficiency, which in turn causes psychological problems within these individuals. This is reflected in lack of willingness of these children to participate in extracurricular activities and conversation, unacceptably low scores in tests, and so on. These consistently low-test scores, and the findings of classroom observation research, tell that we are not providing primary school teachers with adequate understanding of the way children learn and the role of language in this learning. This paper therefore sought to examine the influence of language on effective learning of the Nigerian children.

## Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to assess the influence of language on effective learning of the Nigerian children with a case study of public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine types of languages/dialects spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Find out the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Determine the influence of languages on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

## Research Questions

1. What are the types of languages/dialects spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What are the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
3. What is the influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

## Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant influence of language on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

## Concept of Language

According to Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005), language is important to all manners of transmission of knowledge, values and socialization processes. According to Ejie's (2004) perspective, a language is an indispensable tool in the education of the child. In the same vein, Zhang and Alex (1995) maintain that language acquisition is a natural process for children that occur without effort, although the ability to communicate increases with age, this does not mean that such growth will lead to perfection. Language is central to learning which develops the ability of reading, writing and playing, this is linked to linguistic achievement in school (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2008).

Teachers are not building on the child's own language to introduce early literacy skills in the early primary grades and the children are not able to effectively make the transition to learning all the subjects in the curriculum through English in upper primary grades. According to UNESCO (2008), language and learning are deeply integrated.

## Types of Languages/dialects in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria

The number of languages spoken in Nigeria is still not clear. There have been various views and opinions about it, for instance, (Osaji 1979, Bamgbose 1971; Brann 1990) put the number at about 400 (Adegbija 1991a, 1989). The most recent speculation puts the number between 450 and 500 (Adegbite 2010). Undoubtedly, there are many languages in Nigeria both indigenous and foreign that exist side by side. These languages are assigned different roles or functions depending on the domains and occasions. Therefore, language-use situation in Nigeria is different from what is obtained in other bilingual and monolingual countries.

The Nigerian society is multilingual considering the number of languages existing in the country and the nature of her multilingualism represents a case of linguistic and cultural diversity balance excellence. In the same vein, Akindede and Adegbite (1999), submit that due to the existence of various ethnic groups in Nigeria with over 400 languages, Nigeria is therefore a multilingual and multicultural speech community where diverse languages and cultures compete. Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 500 languages spoken. The official language is English, but it is spoken less frequently in rural areas and amongst people with lower education levels (NPE, 2004). Other major languages spoken include: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Kanuri, and Tiv. Nigerian Sign Language, Hausa Sign Language, and Bura Sign Language are all used in Nigeria (Adegbite 2010).

According to Akpan & Senam (2019), Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria is homogenous in terms of language with Ibibio as the main indigenous language. Yet, there are dialectal groups such as Annang, Oron, Andoni, Ibeno, Eket, Okobo, Mbo, Iwerre and Efik.

### **Concept of Effective Learning**

Learning is defined as that reflective activity which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge. Wagner, Whalley, & Watkins (2002), although the term “effective” has been widely used, it only makes sense when context and goals are specified. Effective for when? Effective for what? The contemporary context has these important features:

- the knowledge base in society is increasing rapidly, and now doubles every 373 days. Teaching knowledge is an anachronism.
- a wider range of the population process and generate knowledge. Information is not the possession of a few “experts”.
- employment prospects relate more to the ability to enhance and transfer learning. The accumulation of qualifications is not enough.
- the landscape of learning is much wider and richer, involving multiple contexts, modes and sources.

Learning is no longer the province of special institutions: it is a way of being. In such a context the goals of learning need to focus lesson knowledge acquisition by individuals, and more on knowledge-generation with others. Effective learners have gained understanding of the individual and social processes necessary to become effective learners (Wagner, Whalley, & Watkins, 2002). This is not just acquisition of particular strategies, but the monitoring and reviewing of learning to see whether strategies are effective. This has been described as "learning how to learn" and "meta-learning". Effective learning includes this extra crucial ingredient “which actively involves the student in meta-cognitive processes of planning, monitoring and reflecting" (Biggs & Moore in Wagner, Whalley, & Watkins, 2002).

## The Language Barriers Identified with the Nigerian Children

Picture it: You show up for your first day at school, and the teacher starts talking to you in a language you don't understand. You're now expected to learn to read and write in this language. According to McConville (2019), language barriers in the classroom are ubiquitous in a country that has an official languages and numerous local languages. From an educational perspective, the results are disastrous. UNESCO estimates that 40% of school-aged children don't have access to education in a language that they understand. Language barriers in the classroom has become a major problem due to the *growing number of minority students who do not speak English*. This is such a huge problem because these learners are not getting the same opportunities to meet their full potential.

Language barriers in the classroom leave kids behind from the start. For any student, basic literacy and numeracy skills are key to building a quality education. Even with just basic reading skills in place, UNESCO estimates that 171 million people could escape *extreme poverty*. Imagine the waste of going through an entire childhood worth of schooling, and still be unable to read. Children learning a second language often struggle to express themselves if they don't have a full command of that language, notes John Schumann of UCLA's Department of Applied Linguistics (McConville, 2019). This can lead to emotional stress and affect their ability to learn. *Parents may also not speak the language used in school*. This hinders progress even further when they can't understand their children's homework in order to help them complete it.

Language acquisition significantly impacts ways in which children learn in the context of the identification, presentation and discussion of objects in pre-primary school and at home. From the perspective of traditional education, the parents use language to educate their young ones at home. They usually made their children imitate the family values. The acquisition of the language of a community allows the children to become a full member of that family or community. Additionally, it serves as an 'identity card' for the children because it signifies where they originate (Owu-Ewie, 2006).

According to Chen (2016), a counseling instructor at the University of British Columbia, not only will a language barrier cause anxiety for international student's, second language anxiety, educational stressors, and sociocultural stressors were identified by Chen as the three biggest challenges for international students. In addition, children are also likely to experience social isolation, prejudice, and discrimination, because of the lack of second language proficiency, which in turn causes psychological problems within these individuals.

### Overcoming Language Barriers

Ouadaogo cited in Owu-Ewie (2006) noted that education and language issues are very complex in Nigeria because of the multi-ethnic and multilingual situation. Teachers need to make all children feel comfortable in all school environments. Parents need to be involved therefore schools need to provide support systems outside of the classroom. Standardized tests are often biased and need to be done away with when dealing with minority children. Creativity, by the teacher to incorporate all children is also very successful. Cultural diversity in the classroom provides opportunities for everyone. It is not only necessary for teachers to encompass all children, but crucial to success in a diverse classroom.

According to Thomas, Brown & McDavid (1998), the Cultural Diversity and Creativity in the Classroom opines ways of overcoming language barriers, such as Creating equal education for all children. Another way of overcoming the problem of language barriers is equal

education for all students. Providing equal opportunities for all students to be able to learn the same materials in the same ways. In other words, providing all students with all of the advantages of learning and not putting any student at a disadvantage for any reason. There have been several programs set up to help ensure equal education for all students and to help immigrant students to succeed in school. Two successful programs dealing with language barriers are BI-lingual education and English as a Second Language program. Both programs help to integrate immigrant students into the classroom (Thomas, Brown & McDavid, 1998). To alleviate the stress that these students experience, some scholars have suggested dealing with the problems with a positive attitude, while also advising the students to reach out for problem-solving resources, especially during their orientation period (Olivas and Li, 2019). As Professor S.G. Nelson said in 1991 in his book, "How Language is Life", language is much more than a vocabulary of words. Language is how people express their feelings and show their individuality, and when different age groups are together, people of all ages must learn how to act around other groups (Olivas and Li, 2019).

### **Influence of Languages/dialects on Effective Learning**

Learning in classrooms is primarily accomplished through language. Teachers lecture, ask questions, orchestrate discussions, and assign reading and writing tasks. Children engage in academic tasks through reading, writing, exploring the Internet, giving verbal answers to teacher questions, listening to teacher lectures and student presentations, participating in whole-class and instructional peer group discussions, memorizing written text and vocabulary, and so on.

Linguistic plurality is reflected in many spheres of the life of Nigerian people. It influences Nigeria's educational system as well (Oyetayo. 2008). The outcome of this is that more than one language is used both in the classroom and in the course of a child's education especially in the pre- and lower primary schools. As stated in the National Policy on Education (2004), the medium of instruction during the pre-primary school stage shall be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment. At the primary school level, the medium of instruction shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years while English shall be taught as a school subject. Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. It is generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the child's mother tongue is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child's environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him (Oluwole, 2008). This no doubt will go a long way to foster proper and adequate communication between teachers and pupils, and further promote learning as the child feels more comfortable to express himself in a language he/she understands and can identify with.

UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953) and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005); parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002); girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often (Hovens, 2002; UNESCO Bangkok, 2005); and children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers (e.g., Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000). Some educators argue that only those countries where the student's first language is the language of instruction are likely to achieve the goals of Education for All. Research also suggests that engaging

marginalized children in school through mother-tongue based, multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is a successful model (Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Yiakoumetti, 2012).

## Method

The study adopted an Expost facto research design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study comprised head teachers and teachers teaching English language in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 100 head teachers and 100 teachers teaching English language, thus, giving a sample size of 200 respondents for the study. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled “Language and Effective Learning Questionnaire (LELQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, completeness and the language of the study under consideration. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.79 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and simple regression. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

## Results and Discussion

### Research Question 1

The research question sought to find out the types of languages/dialects spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data collected as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Percentage analysis of the types of languages/dialects spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

TYPES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Ibibio	95	47.5 **
Annang	26	13
Oron	18	9
Andoni	8	4
Ibeno	6	3
Eket	16	8
Okobo	15	7.5
Mbo	12	6
Iwerre	1	0.5*
Efik	3	1.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

\* The least percentage frequency

**SOURCE:** Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the types of languages/dialects spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that “Ibibio” (47.5%) was rated the highest, while “Iwere” (0.5%) was rated

the least of the types of language spoken by pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### Research Question 2

The research question sought to find out the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data collected as shown in Table 2.

#### Research Question 2: Percentage analysis of the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State

BARRIERS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Deprivation of children of full potential	40	20
Kids being left behind from the start	36	18
Inability to read	31	15.5
Children without full command of the 2nd language struggling to express themselves in that language	26	13
Emotional stress and effect on children ability to learn	24	12*
Difficulty in identification, presentation and discussion of objects	43	21.5**
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*\* The highest percentage frequency

\* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that “Difficulty in identification, presentation and discussion of objects” (21.5%) was rated the highest, while “Emotional stress and effect on children ability to learn” (12%) was rated the least of the language barriers identified with pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### Research Question 3

The research question sought to find out the influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected as shown in Table 3.



**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Variable	N	Arithmetic mean	Expected mean	R	Remarks
Effective Learning	200	16.66	12.5	0.89*	*Strong to perfect Relationship
Language		14.86	12.5		

**Source: Field Survey**

Table 3 presents the result of the descriptive analysis of the influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The two variables were observed to have strong to perfect relationship at 89%. The arithmetic mean for effective learning (16.66) was observed to be greater than the expected mean score of 12.5. In addition to that, the arithmetic mean as regards language (14.86) was observed to be higher than the expected mean score of 12.5. The result therefore means that there is remarkable influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### Hypothesis

The null hypothesis states that there is significant influence of languages on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to test the hypothesis multiple regression was used to analyse the data, (see table 4).

**TABLE 4: Multiple regression of the influence of languages on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.89a	0.78	0.78	0.74	0.78

**\*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 198; N = 200; critical r-value = 0.139**

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.89 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.5 alpha level with 198 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.78 predicts 78% of relationship between languages on the effective learning among pupils. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant influence of languages on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. It was also deemed necessary to find out the extent of the variance of each class of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 5).

**TABLE 2: Analysis of variance of the influence of languages on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	391.29	1	391.29	718.03	.000b
Residual	107.90	198	0.55		
Total	499.19	199			

- a. Dependent Variable: Effective Learning.
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Languages

The above table 5 presents the calculated F-value as (718.03) and the critical f-value as (000). Being that the critical f-value (000a) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant influence exerted by the independent variables (languages) on the dependent variable which is effective learning.

### Discussion of the Findings

The result of the data analysis in table 4 and 5 was significant due to the fact that the calculated R-value 0.89 and F-718.03 were greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant influence of languages on the effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of National Policy on Education (2004), mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. It is generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the child's mother tongue is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child's environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him. This no doubt will go a long way to foster proper and adequate communication between teachers and pupils, and further promote learning as the child feels more comfortable to express himself in a language he/she understands and can identify with (Oluwole, 2008). The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

### Conclusion

It is true that Nigeria is a multilingual society with diverse cultures and languages. Each domain of language-use is known for its unique language use features. Nigeria seems to be a giant in every scope of life which includes the complexity of languages. Based on the findings, the study concluded that there various languages/dialect spoken in Akwa Ibom State which include Ibibio, Annang and many more. There are various language barriers faced by the Akwa Ibom pupils. Finally, there is significant influence of language on effective learning among pupils in public primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### Recommendations

According to the findings and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Language should be important to all manners of transmission of knowledge, values and socialization developments for effective learning of the Nigerian children.
2. Different languages such as language of immediate community, mother tongue and English language should be adopted by the school children at home and in the school.

3. The Nigerian Government should address the implementation of the National Policy on Education in the part of language of instruction in early childhood settings more seriously.
4. Seminars and workshops for teachers must be organized to educate them on the importance and effectiveness of the language of the immediate environment in the early years of learning.

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