

Indigenous Language and Acquisition of Productive English Language Skills Among Primary School Pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of productive English language skills among pupils in public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District. Two research objectives were posed and two hypotheses were formulated. Correlational research design was adopted for this study and the study was conducted in Rivers East Senatorial District. 9,565 primary five (5) pupils found in 359 public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District constituted the population of the study. 936 public primary school pupils which is about 10% of the total population formed the sample size for the study using the multi-stage sampling technique. A researcher designed questionnaire and productive English language inventory were used for data collection. The face and content validity were conducted to determine if the instrument can measure what it intends to measure. The reliability of the instrument was done through the test-retest method and a reliability index of 0.81 and 0.73 were obtained. The data generated was analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Result findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and productive English language skills in terms of fluency. Also, there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and productive English language skills in terms of punctuation among pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and productive English language skills among pupils in terms of fluency, and punctuation among Pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District. The study recommended among others that primary school pupils be allowed to express themselves freely in their indigenous language by allowing them use the language when they could not get the appropriate English words while in school and at home without fear of punishment from parents and teachers.

Keywords: Indigenous language, Productive English Language Skills, Pupils

Introduction

The ability to speak in a conversation and express oneself clearly, write a text that is clear and grammatically correct. Use language creatively and effectively is called productive language skills. Speaking and writing are called productive skills because through speech or written text; humans produce meanings. Speaking is the productive aural/oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances, to convey meaning. It can be done by trying to communicate so that pupils realize their need for language and by speaking so as to increase their fluency and confidence. At first, pupils may be self-conscious and reluctant to speak in front of people. However, there are ways (repetition work and pair work activities) of providing a safer, less public environment in which the pupils can begin to practice speaking. One of such ways is through the use of indigenous language.

Ball (2014) asserted that indigenous language is the language spoken by the residents of a community, it is known to be spoken by people that occupy a region or place and spoken by indigenous people. This language would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations. It is such that an individual may not be from the community and will be able to speak the language because he/she lives there. For children, the early years period is very important in supporting children to become skillful in productive English language skills because children's development in these foundational skills is predictive of how well they will learn when they are exposed to formal reading and writing of instruction in higher classes (Brown, 2000). Learning to read and write is very important in the life of children and it involves exposing the child to certain activities that will help the child to develop the reading and writing skills which are elements of productive English language skills. Some of these activities have to do with the use of fluency and punctuations. The pronunciation and intonation used in pronouncing the indigenous language will most likely reflect in English productive skill as some of the indigenous language has alphabetical correlation with English language.

People and children in particular are exposed to various languages. Some of such languages include indigenous language, mother tongue, slangs among others. Each of these languages the child is exposed to influences the child's overall language development. Most especially, the productive language skills. Languages must be taught and learnt. This is why no group of human beings can afford to have its indigenous language discarded. It is only in teaching and learning the

indigenous language that the cultural heritage of a people can be transmitted from generation to generation. Communication using productive English language skill is better enhanced in a medium that expresses the indigenous language of a given people.

A strong base in the indigenous language and productive skills is that it equips a child with productive skills that helps him master reading and writing through word decoding and encoding in other languages. This is possible because the child acquires the spoken language organically and can easily relate to the sounds of the spoken language with the written alphabet. The use of indigenous language manifests creativity in the use of letters, punctuation and numbers and that it increases intonation awareness in children. Different people have their own unique texting styles depending on the messages and the person who receives the message. Some are relational and some informational which require a change in register. Writing with children involves primarily the facilitation of their written expression through the developmental progression from drawing, punctuations, and writing (Mackenzie, 2011).

As most active users of any foreign language know, speaking and writing are in reciprocal relationship. Proper use of words and certain extent of accuracy need to be respected. The relationship between indigenous language and the acquisition of English language skills is worth researching because the average primary school pupil is unable to be sufficiently literate in either the indigenous language or English language. If permanent literacy is to be promoted in the primary schools, the relationship of the indigenous language as the medium of instruction on the acquisition of productive language skills must be studied. At this juncture, it is very imperative to look at whether indigenous language has bearing on the acquisition of productive English language skills among pupils of upper primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District.

The use of English language in our schools as a *Lingua Franca* at all levels of education and the Nigerian society at large has not been without problems. Naturally, the Nigerian child is faced with diversity of languages spoken within his/her environment. One of such languages is the indigenous language which is in no way the typical English language. The use of indigenous language, no doubt impairs the child from effectively using the pure English language in his/her day-to-day activities (Elif, 2017). Since the productive or expressive language skill is most used, the use of different languages within the child's environment impact more on the productive English

language skill of the child. The productive language skills in this study are fluency and punctuation. It is observed that there is difficulty in the primary school pupil's fluency and punctuation which is a gap this study intends to fill. The child in the primary school cannot completely be described as one that demonstrates the volume of an efficient productive English language speaker. For this reason, there is a need to engage in a study such as this, to determine the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of productive English language skill among primary school pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District, of Rivers State. The specific objectives guiding this study are to; find out the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of fluency in Rivers East Senatorial District and to establish the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of punctuation in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses below were formulated to further guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of fluency in Rivers East Senatorial District.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of punctuation in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Methodology

Correlation research design was adopted for this study and the study was conducted in Rivers East Senatorial District. The population of the study consist of 9,565 primary five (5) pupils found in 359 public primary schools in Rivers East Senatorial District out of which 936 public primary school pupils which is about 10% of the total population formed the sample size for the study using the multi-stage sampling technique. The number of primary schools in the urban area is 235 with 6,482 primary five (5) pupils and the number of primary schools in the rural area is 124 with 3,083 primary five (5) pupils. The researcher collected the list of public primary schools from the State

Universal Basic Education Board and used the systematic random sampling technique to select a school at every 10 systematically and in all, 36 public primary schools in both urban and rural areas were selected. On arrival at the selected 36 public primary schools, the researcher adopted the simple random sampling technique using ballot-with-replacement approach to sample 26 pupils in each of the 36 schools. In all, 936 pupils were sampled. The main instrument for the study was a Researcher designed a questionnaire and inventory. The face and content validity were conducted by 2 lecturers in the department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Iganatius Ajuru University, Port Harcourt to determine if the instrument can measure what it intends to measure. The reliability of the instruments was done through the test-retest method. The researcher administered 20 copies of the instruments to primary 5 pupils in Emohua Local Government and the same instruments was re-administered after two weeks. The retrieved instrument from the two sessions were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and a reliability index of 0.81 and 0.73 were obtained. The instrument was administered and 908 copies of the 936 questionnaires were retrieved. Research question and the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill in terms of fluency among Pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skills in terms of fluency among Pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District

		Indigenous language	Fluency
Indigenous language	Pearson Correlation	1	.153**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Fluency	Pearson Correlation	.153**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
n		908	908

Table 1 presents the results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis, which aims to examine the relationship between indigenous language and the acquisition of productive English language skills in terms of fluency among pupils in the Rivers East Senatorial District. Result shows that the p-value = .153 was obtained. Overall, the results suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between indigenous language and English language skills in terms of fluency among pupils Rivers East Senatorial District. The p-value obtained is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of punctuation in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Table 2: Summary of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skills in terms of punctuation among Pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District

		Indigenous language	Punctuation
Indigenous language	Pearson Correlation	1	-.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.913
Punctuation	Pearson Correlation	-.005	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.913	
n		908	908

Table 2 presents the results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis, which aims to examine the relationship between indigenous language and the acquisition of productive English language skills in terms of punctuation among pupils in the Rivers East Senatorial District. Result shows that the p-value = .913 was obtained. Overall, the results suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between indigenous language and English language skills in terms of punctuation among pupils Rivers East Senatorial District. The p-value obtained is statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study revealed in its results that there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and productive English language skills in terms of fluency among pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District. This finding is in line with Mackenzie (2011) who researched on indigenous language and productive English language skills and concluded that a strong base in

the indigenous language and productive skills is that it equips a child with productive skills that helps him master reading and writing through word decoding and encoding in other languages. This is possible because the child acquires the spoken language organically and can easily relate to the sounds of the spoken language with the written alphabet (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2012).

Mackenzie (2011) posited that the use of indigenous language manifests creativity in the use of letters, punctuation and numbers and that it increases intonation awareness in children. Different people have their own unique texting styles depending on the messages and the person who receives the message. Some are relational and some informational which require a change in register. Writing with children involves primarily the facilitation of their written expression through the developmental progression from drawing, punctuations, and writing. He further stated that languages must be taught and learnt, specifically the indigenous language which can be naturally acquired. This is because no group of human beings can afford to have its language discarded. It is only in teaching and learning the languages that the heritage will live on. Every language reflects the culture of a people. Thus, it is logical to say that people would express themselves and their cultures better in the language of their own. Communication is better enhanced in a medium that expresses the totality of the culture of a given people. It is well-known that the indigenous environment has a great influence on language learning. The environment can provide opportunities for language learning, or it can present obstacles. The right environment can make language learning fun, while the wrong environment can make it frustrating.

The most important factor in the language learning environment is the people. If the people around the learner are supportive and interested in helping the learner, then the learner will make progress. On the other hand, if the people around the learner are not supportive or are not interested in helping the learner, then the learner will not make progress. Another important factor in the language learning environment is the level of difficulty of the language. If the language is too difficult, the learner will become frustrated and give up. On the other hand, if the language is not difficult enough, the learner will become bored and give up. The last important factor in the language learning environment is the amount of time that the learner has to devote to language learning. If the learner has a lot of time, he or she will make progress. On the other hand, if the learner does not have a lot of time, he or she will not make progress.

The second finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and productive English language skills in terms of punctuation among pupils in Rivers East Senatorial District. In alliance with the finding of this study, Ife and Adeyemi (2016) conducted a study on English Language Dominance and the Fate of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria. The research positioned that the blind glorification of English language by the elites as well as the defective National Policy on Language has conspired to undermine the local languages and rob them of their importance in national development drive which has in turn had a negative impact on pupils writing skills. The paper examined the reason(s) for the continued dominance of English language and its widely accepted usage in all spheres of life, including the social media, in Nigeria. It then evaluates the contributions and the levels of involvements of key stakeholders namely the government, the media, the parents and the youths in the marginalisation of indigenous languages. The paper suggests that to break the tenacious grip on the colonial master's language which has made it difficult for the vast majority of the Nigerian population to participate in the overall national development, the stakeholders, most especially the government and the media, need to review their attitude towards the indigenous languages.

In the same vein, Jacolyn and Maria (2016) posited in their research on the influence of indigenous language on English language that indigenous language is a stronghold part of the development of the learners' personality and intelligence. This further narrows the scope of this study to the basic linguistic parameter in language acquisition and its usage, these include ethnic, educational and linguistic. Under ethnic environment the dialect variance in Yoruba ethnic groups do not just manifest in their mother tongue but also in their learning of English. Podder (2011) posited that psychologically, the proper development of the child is closely with the continuous use of his indigenous language which is his first language. To ignore this familiar language (Indigenous language) and begin to teach the child in a foreign and unfamiliar language, second language (Mother Tongue) takes the child from home thus, putting him among strangers. Salawu (2004) revealed that in most developing countries, communication in indigenous languages has been adversely affected which is traceable to their colonisation. For instance, English is Nigeria's official language and the main medium of communication; therefore, indigenous languages are not highly esteemed in certain parts of Nigeria. The structure that the colonialists handed down remains today, decades after they have left. In fact, it is even more strengthened as English (for instance) and Western education continue to be the language and education of power and progress

in life. Therefore, there is understandably ever and fast-growing interest in both the language and the education. The attitude of most native speakers to their languages is by far the greatest problem militating against the survival of African languages. The elites are, however, the most guilty of this. This is, equally, reflected in their attitude towards the patronage of indigenous language press, in terms of readership and advertisement placement (Salawu, 2004a, 2004b).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of fluency in Rivers East Senatorial District. Furthermore, there is no significant relationship between indigenous language and acquisition of Productive English language skill among primary school pupils in terms of punctuation in Rivers East Senatorial District.

Recommendations

Based on findings of this study, the following are the recommendations are made:

1. It is recommended that primary school pupils be allowed to express themselves freely in their indigenous language. The use of indigenous language should be incorporated into teaching and pupils should be allowed to speak it in school and at home without fear of punishment from parents and teachers. By so doing, the menace of poor pronunciation in terms of fluency will be permanently solved;
2. Government and education stakeholders at all levels should prioritize indigenous language as a means of communication in the classroom. This will go a long way to assist the pupils in acquiring productive English language skills and other skills needed to excel in school. By so doing, the menace of poor writing in terms of punctuations will be permanently solved.

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