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The Effect of Mother Tongue Instruction on Pupils' Academic Achievement in Primary Schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area, Kano State

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

This study examined the effect of mother tongue instruction on pupils' academic achievement in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area, Kano State. The study was motivated by concerns about the effectiveness of using a second language as the medium of instruction at the primary-school level, where pupils are still developing basic literacy, comprehension and cognitive skills. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised teachers in selected primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area, while a sample of 55 teachers from 10 primary schools was used. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to obtain teachers' views on the use of mother tongue, pupils' comprehension, classroom participation, academic achievement and challenges associated with mother-tongue instruction. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and mean scores, while inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between mother tongue instruction and pupils' academic achievement. The findings indicate that mother tongue is considerably used during classroom instruction, particularly when teachers explain difficult concepts. The findings further indicate that mother tongue instruction enhances pupils' comprehension, encourages classroom participation and contributes positively to perceived academic achievement. However, inadequate textbooks and instructional materials, insufficient teacher training, parental preference for English and difficulties associated with the transition from mother tongue to English were identified as major challenges. The study concludes that mother tongue instruction can provide an effective foundation for learning at the primary school level when properly implemented. It recommends the provision of adequate instructional materials in Hausa, regular teacher training in mother-tongue-based pedagogy, greater parental sensitization and the adoption of a carefully planned bilingual approach that progressively develops pupils' competence in English.

Keywords: Mother tongue, Hausa language, academic achievement, primary education, pupils, language of instruction, Gwarzo Local Government Area.

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Introduction

Language is central to education because teaching and learning depend fundamentally on communication between teachers and learners. At the primary-school level, language performs an especially important role because pupils are acquiring the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes upon which subsequent education depends. The

language through which teachers explain concepts, give instructions, ask questions and assess understanding can therefore influence pupils' participation and academic achievement.

Mother tongue refers generally to the language first acquired by an individual or the language most closely associated with the individual's early home and community environment. In multilingual societies, however, the concept may overlap with terms such as home language, first language, indigenous language and language of the immediate community. For educational purposes, mother tongue instruction refers to the use of a language familiar to pupils as the principal medium through which teaching and learning take place.

The importance of mother tongue instruction has received considerable attention internationally. UNESCO has long supported mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building on the knowledge and experience learners already possess. UNESCO also emphasizes the importance of producing adequate reading materials and preparing teachers who are competent in the language used for instruction.

The argument for mother tongue education is partly based on the principle that children understand and communicate new concepts more effectively when instruction is connected to a language they already know. A familiar language can reduce the cognitive burden associated with simultaneously learning new subject matter and interpreting an unfamiliar instructional language. UNESCO's work on mother-tongue-based bilingual and multilingual education similarly identifies opportunities for greater communication, participation and learning when children receive instruction through familiar languages during the early years.

Gwarzo Local Government Area is one of the local government areas of Kano State. Primary schools within the area serve pupils from communities where Hausa is an important language of social interaction. The extent to which teachers use Hausa or another familiar language in classroom instruction may therefore influence pupils' comprehension, participation and achievement.

The relationship between mother tongue and academic achievement has been examined in several Nigerian studies. Adebiyi's study of Nigerian primary-school pupils found that children taught through mother tongue performed better in reading skills than pupils exposed to English as the principal instructional language in the comparison context. Similarly, research on mother-tongue medium and scholastic attainment in Nigeria reported academic advantages associated with extended mother-tongue instruction.

The Nigerian situation is also complicated by parental and teacher attitudes. Research involving Nigerian primary-school teachers and parents found that although both groups recognized advantages associated with mother-tongue education, many parents did not want their children to be taught primarily through the mother tongue. The study identified the desire for a language of wider communication and inadequate teaching materials among the major obstacles to mother-tongue instruction. It is against this background that this study focuses on the effect of mother tongue instruction on pupils' academic achievement in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area of Kano State.

The primary school is expected to provide pupils with foundational competencies in literacy, numeracy, communication, problem-solving and social development. However, pupils' ability to benefit from classroom instruction depends partly on their ability to understand the language in which lessons are delivered.

Although Nigerian education policy has recognized the importance of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment, implementation remains problematic. Recent research indicates that compliance with Nigeria's language-of-instruction policy varies by school type and geographical setting.

The situation raises an important question in Gwarzo Local Government Area: does the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction improve pupils' academic achievement, and under what classroom conditions can it be most effective?

There are also practical challenges. Some teachers may lack adequate training in mother-tongue-based

pedagogy. Schools may have limited textbooks and other instructional materials written in Hausa. Some parents may prefer English because they associate it with educational advancement and future employment opportunities. Teachers may consequently alternate between Hausa and English without a clear bilingual instructional strategy.

Furthermore, while previous studies have examined mother tongue and academic achievement in different parts of Nigeria, there remains a need for context-specific investigation of primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area. Educational conditions, teacher practices, community language patterns and availability of instructional resources may differ from those of other Nigerian locations. The problem of this study, therefore, is to determine whether and to what extent mother tongue instruction affects pupils' academic achievement in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area, Kano State.

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of mother tongue instruction on pupils' academic achievement in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area, Kano State. The following research questions guide the study:

1. To what extent is mother tongue used as a medium of instruction in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area?
2. What effect does mother tongue instruction have on pupils' academic achievement?
3. Do pupils taught through mother tongue demonstrate better comprehension than pupils taught predominantly through English?

Theoretical Framework

Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Perspective

This study can be anchored in the linguistic interdependence perspective associated with Jim Cummins. The perspective proposes that knowledge and literacy skills developed in one language can support learning in another language when adequate conditions for transfer exist. The implication is that developing strong conceptual and literacy foundations in pupils' familiar language can provide a foundation for subsequent learning in English. Thus, mother tongue instruction does not necessarily compete with English. Instead, it can provide a foundation for developing the cognitive and literacy abilities that pupils later apply when learning English.

This theoretical position is relevant to the present study because pupils in Gwarzo may acquire foundational knowledge through Hausa while simultaneously developing English competence. A well-designed bilingual approach may therefore allow pupils to benefit from both languages.

The study can also be supported by Constructivist Learning Theory. Constructivism views learning as an active process in which learners construct new knowledge by connecting new experiences with prior knowledge. Mother tongue instruction is compatible with this perspective because familiar language enables teachers to connect academic concepts to pupils' existing experiences. When pupils can discuss, question and interpret new information through a language they understand, they are better positioned to construct meaning. The theory therefore provides a useful explanation for why mother tongue may improve comprehension and participation in primary-school classrooms.

Literature Review

Mother Tongue

Mother tongue is generally understood as the first language acquired naturally by a child, particularly through interaction with parents, siblings and members of the immediate community. It is often the language through which children initially understand their social environment and develop their earliest concepts.

The concept, however, is not always identical to "first language." In multilingual families, children may acquire more than one language from birth. Therefore, educational discussions increasingly use related expressions such as home language, first language, community language and language of the immediate environment. For the purpose of this

study, mother tongue refers to the familiar local language through which pupils in the study area can naturally understand, communicate and interact, particularly Hausa where it constitutes the relevant community language.

Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction

Mother tongue instruction involves using the learner's familiar language to communicate curriculum content. It may be used exclusively for a particular period or as part of a bilingual approach in which the mother tongue and English are used strategically.The major rationale is that pupils should not be required to learn a new concept and a new language simultaneously when they are still developing foundational educational skills. When the instructional language is familiar, the teacher can concentrate on explaining the subject matter while pupils can devote greater attention to understanding, reasoning and applying new knowledge.UNESCO has consistently supported mother tongue instruction in the early years and emphasizes that teaching materials and teacher preparation are essential components of successful implementation.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement refers to the level of knowledge, skills or competencies demonstrated by a learner after receiving instruction. It is commonly measured through tests, examinations, assignments, classroom activities and other forms of educational assessment.

In this study, academic achievement refers primarily to pupils' performance on an achievement test developed around selected primary-school curriculum content. Achievement may be reflected through pupils' ability to recall information, explain concepts, solve problems, apply knowledge and answer questions correctly.

Mother Tongue and Cognitive Development

Language is closely connected to thinking and cognitive development. Children use language to organize experiences, communicate ideas and develop conceptual relationships. A familiar language can therefore provide a foundation upon which new academic knowledge is constructed.Mother-tongue instruction enables pupils to connect new concepts with existing experiences. For example, a teacher explaining a science concept through a language pupils already understand can use familiar objects, experiences and expressions to establish meaning before introducing technical terminology.

UNESCO's literature on mother-tongue-based bilingual and multilingual education identifies the cognitive and communicative benefits of giving children opportunities to learn through familiar languages during early education.

Mother Tongue Instruction and Reading Achievement

Reading is one of the areas in which language choice can have a particularly strong influence. Children initially learn to associate written symbols with sounds, meanings and concepts. When the language of literacy instruction is familiar, pupils can concentrate on developing decoding, vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Adebiyi's study of Nigerian primary-school pupils found evidence that children receiving mother-tongue instruction performed better in reading skills than pupils in the comparison group taught through English. The study recommended stronger enforcement of mother-tongue use during the early primary years.

Earlier Nigerian research also found evidence of higher scholastic attainment among pupils who received extended mother-tongue instruction, demonstrating the potential benefits of maintaining a familiar instructional language beyond the initial years of schooling.

Empirical Review

Adebiyi investigated the effects of Nigeria's mother-tongue education policy on children's achievement in reading skills using a randomized pre-test experimental and control-group design. The study

involved 215 Primary Three pupils from four schools. The results indicated that pupils taught through mother tongue demonstrated stronger reading performance in the study context.

Bamgbose reviewed evidence concerning mother-tongue medium and scholastic attainment in Nigeria. The reported evaluation of the Six-Year Primary Project found that pupils who remained under mother-tongue instruction for six years performed better academically than those who shifted to English after three years.

Ibode and Lasaki investigated the effect of Yoruba language on primary-school pupils' achievement in numeracy in Ibadan. Their quasi-experimental study involved 197 Primary Four pupils and compared a Yoruba Language Teaching Strategy with conventional English-medium instruction.

A study in Anambra State investigated mother-tongue instruction and Basic Science achievement using a quasi-experimental design. The findings indicated that learners taught through mother tongue performed better than those taught through English. The study further reported no significant gender difference in achievement under the treatment conditions.

Bosah, Okika and Anozie examined mother-tongue medium as a correlate of pupils' achievement in Basic Science in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. Using data from teachers and pupils' achievement records, the study found a high positive relationship between mother tongue and Basic Science achievement.

However, Piper and colleagues' Kenyan randomized study presents a more cautious perspective. The study found no additional benefits of the mother-tongue treatment for English and Kiswahili outcomes and reported somewhat lower mathematics outcomes. This demonstrates that the effects of mother tongue depend on implementation and instructional context.

The reviewed empirical studies generally indicate potential academic benefits from mother tongue instruction, but they also show that language policy alone cannot guarantee improved achievement. Teacher competence, materials, community attitudes, instructional quality and transition arrangements are crucial.

Research Design

A mixed descriptive and quasi-experimental approach was carried out. The descriptive survey component examined teachers' perceptions, the extent of mother tongue use and implementation challenges. The quasi-experimental component compared pupils taught selected curriculum content through mother tongue with pupils taught the same content predominantly through English.

Area of the Study

The study is conducted in Gwarzo Local Government Area of Kano State, Nigeria. Gwarzo is located within Kano State and contains communities where Hausa is widely used in everyday communication. The area is appropriate for the study because the linguistic environment makes it possible to investigate the relationship between a familiar indigenous language and classroom learning at the primary-school level. The population should consist of eight hundred and six pupils and fifty five teachers in selected public primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area. A multistage sampling technique was employed. First, a number of primary schools was selected from the local government area. Second, participating schools were grouped according to geographical location. Third, intact primary-school classes were selected for the achievement component. Two major instruments were employed: Mother Tongue Instruction Questionnaire (MTIQ) and Academic Achievement Test (AAT)

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The data are presented according to the research questions and hypotheses. Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation are used for the descriptive analysis, while the hypotheses are tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Distribution of Respondents by School

Table 1: Distribution of the 55 Teachers According to Schools

S/N	Selected Primary School	Number of Teachers	Percentage (%)
1	HAYIN GADA PRIMARY SCH	6	10.9
2	GWARZO MODEL	5	9.1
3	TAHAFIZUL QUR'AN ISLAMIYYA PRI SCHOOL	6	10.9
4	TABANNI ISLAMIYYA PRIMARY SCHOOL	5	9.1
5	SUNUSI IDRIS ISLAMIYYA PRI SCH	6	10.9
6	SHEIKH IBRAHIM PRIMARY ISLAMIYYA SCHOOL	5	9.1
7	MARORI PRIMARY SCHOOL	6	10.9
8	MALAMAWA PRIMARY SCHOOL	5	9.1
9	MAL YARE PRIMARY SCHOOL	6	10.9
10	MAKERA ISLAMIYYA PRIMARY SCHOOL	5	9.1
Total		55	100.0

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that the study involved 55 teachers from 10 selected primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area. Six teachers were selected from Schools Mallam Yare Primary School, Marori Primary School, Sunusi Idris Islamiyya Pri Sch, Tahafizul Qur'an Islamiyya Pri school and Hayin Gada Primary School respectively, while five teachers were selected from Gwarzo model, Tabanni Islamiyya Primary School, Sheikh Ibrahim Primary Islamiyya School, Malamawa Primary School and Makera Islamiyya Primary School respectively. The distribution ensures that all ten selected schools are represented in the study.

Table 2: Distribution of Teachers by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	32	58.2
Female	23	41.8
Total	55	100.0

Interpretation

Table 2 indicates that 32 respondents (58.2%) were male, while 23 respondents (41.8%) were female. This shows that male teachers constituted a slightly higher proportion of the respondents.

Table 3: Distribution of Teachers by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20–29 years	9	16.4
30–39 years	21	38.2
40–49 years	17	30.9
50 years and above	8	14.5
Total	55	100.0

Interpretation

The table shows that the largest group of respondents, 21 teachers (38.2%), were between 30 and 39 years of age. This was followed by 17 teachers (30.9%) aged 40–49 years. Nine respondents (16.4%) were aged 20–29 years, while eight (14.5%) were 50 years and above.

Table 4: Distribution of Teachers by Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1–5 years	8	14.5
6–10 years	15	27.3
11–15 years	17	30.9
16 years and above	15	27.3
Total	55	100.0

Interpretation

Table 4 indicates that 17 teachers (30.9%) had 11–15 years of teaching experience. Fifteen teachers (27.3%) had 6–10 years of experience, while another 15 (27.3%) had 16 years or more. Eight respondents (14.5%) had between one and five years of teaching experience. This suggests that most respondents had substantial teaching experience.

Research Question 1:

To what extent is mother tongue used as a medium of instruction in primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area?

Table 5: Teachers' Responses on the Use of Mother Tongue in Classroom Instruction

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Teachers frequently use mother tongue during classroom instruction.	25	19	4	5	2	4.09	Agree
2	Mother tongue is used to explain difficult concepts.	29	17	3	4	2	4.22	Agree
3	Pupils are encouraged to ask questions in mother tongue.	24	21	4	4	2	4.11	Agree
4	Mother tongue is used when pupils have difficulty understanding English.	30	18	2	4	1	4.31	Agree
5	Teachers use mother tongue to give classroom instructions.	23	22	5	4	1	4.13	Agree
Grand Mean							4.17	Agree

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Interpretation

Table 5 shows that the respondents generally agreed that mother tongue is used in classroom instruction. The highest mean score of 4.31 was recorded for the statement that mother tongue is used when pupils experience difficulty understanding English.

The lowest mean score of 4.09 was recorded for the statement that teachers frequently use mother tongue during classroom instruction. The overall mean of 4.17 indicates that mother tongue is substantially used as a supportive medium of instruction in the selected primary schools.

Research Question 2:

What effect does mother tongue instruction have on pupils' academic achievement?

Table 6: Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Mother Tongue on Academic Achievement

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Mother tongue helps pupils understand lessons better.	31	18	2	3	1	4.36	Agree
2	Pupils taught through mother tongue perform better in class activities.	27	20	3	4	1	4.24	Agree
3	Mother tongue improves pupils' retention of lesson content.	28	19	3	4	1	4.25	Agree
4	Pupils understand difficult concepts better when explained in mother tongue.	32	17	2	3	1	4.40	Agree
5	Mother tongue contributes to improved academic performance.	29	19	3	3	1	4.31	Agree
Grand Mean							4.31	Agree

Interpretation

The results in Table 6 indicate that teachers generally perceive mother tongue instruction as having a positive effect on pupils' academic achievement. The highest mean of 4.40 was obtained for the statement that pupils understand difficult concepts better when they are explained in mother tongue.

The overall mean of 4.31 indicates strong agreement among the respondents that mother tongue instruction contributes positively to pupils' academic achievement.

Research Question 3:

Does mother tongue instruction improve pupils' comprehension of lesson content?

Table 7: Mother Tongue Instruction and Pupils' Comprehension

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Pupils comprehend lessons more easily when mother tongue is used.	33	17	2	2	1	4.44	Agree
2	Mother tongue enables pupils to understand teachers' explanations.	30	20	2	2	1	4.38	Agree
3	Pupils ask more questions when mother tongue is used.	28	20	3	3	1	4.29	Agree
4	Mother tongue reduces pupils' difficulty in understanding new concepts.	31	19	2	2	1	4.40	Agree
5	Pupils retain information better when lessons are explained in mother tongue.	29	20	3	2	1	4.35	Agree
Grand Mean							4.37	Agree

Interpretation

The table reveals a generally positive perception of the role of mother tongue in improving pupils' comprehension. The overall mean of 4.37 suggests that respondents strongly agreed that the use of mother tongue helps pupils understand and retain lesson content.

Discussion of Findings

The findings suggest that mother tongue plays an important role in the teaching and learning process in the selected primary schools in Gwarzo Local Government Area.

The first finding indicates that teachers make considerable use of mother tongue during instruction, particularly when pupils experience difficulties understanding English. This suggests that mother tongue serves as an important pedagogical resource.

The finding is consistent with the broader argument that familiar-language instruction allows children to connect new information with existing linguistic and experiential knowledge. UNESCO has emphasized the importance of mother-tongue-based education during the early years of schooling.

The second finding indicates a positive perceived

effect of mother tongue on academic achievement. This agrees with previous Nigerian studies that reported positive academic outcomes associated with mother-tongue instruction in reading and other subjects.

The third finding shows that mother tongue is perceived to improve pupils' comprehension. This may be explained by the fact that pupils do not need to spend excessive cognitive effort interpreting unfamiliar language before they can understand the academic concept being taught.

The fourth finding reveals that inadequate instructional materials are a major challenge. This finding agrees with the wider literature, which identifies the availability of appropriate teaching and reading materials as an essential condition for successful mother-tongue education.

Finally, the study indicates that mother tongue encourages pupils' classroom participation. Pupils may be more willing to answer questions and express themselves when they can communicate in a language they understand well.

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