



Research Article

Correlation among Mother Tongue, Socio-Economic Status and Social Studies Students' Academic Performance in Delta State

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Abstract

This research investigated the effect of mother tongue (Urhobo Language) on the academic performance of Social Studies students in junior secondary schools in Delta State. The study focused on one independent variable, Urhobo language instruction, while academic performance served as the dependent variable, and socioeconomic status was examined as a moderating variable. A quasi-experimental before-test after-test control group design with a 2x2 matrix structure was employed. The population comprised eighty thousand, nine hundred and twelve students of social studies in Delta State during the 2023/2024 academic session, from which 100 students were selected using multistage, purposive, and random sampling techniques. One school was utilized as the experimental group, receiving instruction in Urhobo, while the other group was taught in English. Data were collected using the Social Studies Mother Tongue Test (SSMTT), which had a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The questions raised in the research were answered with descriptive statistics, while hypotheses were analyzed with a t-test at a 0.05 level of significance. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The findings revealed that students taught Social Studies in Urhobo performed remarkably better than those taught in English, demonstrating that mother-tongue instruction enhances comprehension, retention, and engagement. Additionally, socioeconomic status did not moderate the relationship between language of instruction and academic performance, suggesting that language familiarity is more influential than financial status. The study recommends policy initiatives that encourage the use of mother tongue for social studies instruction and good parental support for mother-tongue learning. These findings contribute to educational research by reinforcing the cognitive advantages of incorporating mother-tongue into social studies instruction and its potential to improve learning outcomes across socioeconomic groups.

Keywords: Mother-tongue, Urhobo, Academic achievement, socioeconomic status, social studies and Delta State.



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Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in human development as it sharpens individuals and societies. Therefore, in Nigeria, the language of instruction in the educational routine may significantly impact students' academic performance and educational outcomes. Academic performance is a complex measure that reflects students' ability to grasp, retain, and apply knowledge acquired in different school subjects (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). In Nigeria, education is considered a priority by the government, as it is seen as a solution to ignorance and a means of

nurturing an enlightened, dynamic, resourceful, and productive citizenry. On the other hand, social studies is considered a crucial subject; it is seen as a tool that aids the accomplishment of educational goals in Nigeria. Looking at the Nigerian educational system, Social Studies is made mandatory for all lower, middle, and upper-basic students. It continues in the form of Civics Education and Government at the Senior Secondary School level (Garb et al., 2012).

Social Studies is the study of how man interacts with his environments, these environments include social, physical, political, economic, or cultural. It also explores how the environment influences man in return. Social Studies touches on all aspects of human life and plays a vital role in individual and national growth/development (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). Social Studies helps make students obedient citizens and self-reliant, by enhancing tolerance, unity, kindness, peace, tranquility, development, and survival in the country of Nigeria.

The performance of students in Social Studies plays a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic development of our country (Atubi, 2021). By examining students' academic achievements, we can gauge their comprehension of Social Studies concepts (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). Despite the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program's mandate for comprehensive Social Studies education within the Nigerian school system, the subject has not fully achieved its goals (Adeyemi, 2019). Indicators such as gender-specific grades and test scores reveal a concerning trend: students' grasp of the material has been inadequate. The challenges extend beyond academic performance, as students struggle to meet the standards expected in a subject so integral to understanding societal dynamics. Additionally, language proficiency, including the language of instruction, has not been effectively linked to academic success. This oversight neglects Oluwole's (2008) argument that instruction in students' native languages (mother tongue) can enhance their understanding and mastery of the subject matter.

Mother tongue refers to the language that learners have been speaking at home from the time of birth. Mother tongue instruction departs from the traditional practice of placing the English language as a primary language used for teaching in many Nigerian schools, including those in Delta State. This approach aims to preserve the native language and cultural heritage of learners while promoting high academic success. While acknowledging the importance of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2008). Oyetunde (2015) claimed that the supporters of mother-tongue teaching believe that this can help students to gain a deeper comprehension of what they are being taught in school. This, they opined, can potentially enhance students' academic performance. Moreover, adopting the mother tongue as the medium of teaching can improve students' communication skills. Teaching in a familiar language encourages active participation in classroom discussions and enables students to express their thoughts and ideas effectively. Ajayi & Adeyemo (2015) suggest that instruction in one's mother tongue yields cognitive benefits, fostering improved critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and overall cognitive development. Crucially, mother tongue instruction will address educational disparities by ensuring that students who speak indigenous languages at home do not face any form of learning disadvantage in schools (Oyetunde, 2015). This potential contribution to educational equity underscores the importance of using the mother tongue as the language for teaching social studies.

Accordingly, Adegbite & Akindele (2021), posited that language serves as the primary vehicle for instruction and knowledge acquisition, making it a crucial factor in students' academic performance. The Urhobo language, as one of the indigenous languages in Delta State, plays a significant role in shaping students' cognitive development and comprehension abilities, particularly in Social Studies. Research suggests that when students receive instruction in their mother tongue, they tend to grasp abstract concepts more effectively and demonstrate improved retention of subject matter (Oyetade, 2022). In the context of Social Studies, which involves an understanding of societal structures, cultural heritage, and civic responsibilities,

linguistic familiarity enhances students' engagement and participation. According to Eshiet & Okon (2023), students who learn through a language they are comfortable with tend to develop stronger analytical skills, as they can relate classroom knowledge to real-life experiences. The Urhobo language, being the first language for many students in Delta State, provides a cognitive scaffold that supports their ability to analyse historical events, governance systems, and social interactions. Furthermore, studies indicate that linguistic interference can occur when there is a mismatch between the language of instruction and students' mother tongue. According to Uchenna & Bello (2020), when students struggle with language comprehension, they often experience difficulties in following classroom discussions, completing assignments, and performing well in assessments. This phenomenon is evident among Urhobo-speaking students who are taught Social Studies in English without adequate linguistic transition support. As a result, they may find it challenging to articulate ideas clearly and engage in critical discussions, thereby affecting their academic outcomes.

Despite the benefits of employing the mother tongue, educational policies in Nigeria emphasize English as the medium of instruction beyond the lower primary level. According to Nwokocho & Adejumo (2023), this transition often disrupts students' learning patterns, as they must adjust to a language that is not their primary mode of communication. For Urhobo-speaking students, this shift can contribute to a decline in academic performance, particularly in subjects like Social Studies, where interpretative skills of contextual understanding are needed. To bridge this gap, scholars advocate for bilingual education models that incorporate indigenous languages into classroom instruction. According to Igbokwe (2021), adopting a dual-language approach can increase students' understanding and scholastic success by making them analyze information in their traditional language before transitioning to English. Implementing such strategies for Urhobo-speaking students in Social Studies classrooms could enhance their performance and foster greater interest in the subject.

Statement of the problem

From the beginning, when formal education was introduced to Nigeria by the colonialists, English has always been utilized as the official language of teaching all school subjects across Nigerian schools. Therefore, the emphasis has always been on adopting the language in every institution of education in the country; hence, the National Policy of Education (NPE) has considered it as a significant discipline in every other one. As a result, the academic performance of students in Social Studies has always depended on it. Apart from the problem of adopting the English language as the official language of education, other factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and school location are also a threat. The academic performance of students has been good over the years. Still, it may be even better if they are taught using their mother tongue as the traditional language of instruction. However, these researchers would want to look at the use of Urhobo as a mother tongue as the language of instruction to see if the academic performance of students in Social Studies will become better if they are taught with it than when taught with the English language. Can a child learn better or faster when he/she is taught social studies in their traditional language or not? Can instruction through the mother tongue as a language help the learners to embrace more knowledge of social studies concepts more quickly and easily? Or help them in explaining the subject content more adequately or correctly? Better still, will it help in the acquisition of manipulative and practical skills easily, or assist students in developing desirable behavior and attitudes towards people? These and other questions are those that the study is poised to answer. Therefore, the research problem of this study is "What will be the effect of mother tongue (Urhobo) and socio-economic status on social studies students' academic performance in Delta State?"

Research Problem Questions

Two problem research questions were formulated in the study:

1. Will there be any difference in the post test of social studies students taught with Urhobo language as mother-tongue and those that were taught with English language?
2. How will socioeconomic status affect the usage of Urhobo language as mother tongue and post test scores of social studies students?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were structured and were also proven at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no compelling difference in the post-test performance of social studies Upper Basic students that were taught with Urhobo language as mother-tongue and those taught with English as language of instruction.
2. Socioeconomic status do not moderate the effect of the Urhobo language as the mother tongue and post-test performance of social studies students.

Research Procedure

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group research design. The study's targeted population encompassed all Upper Basic 8 Social Studies students in Delta State, totaling 80,912 students during the 2023/2024 academic session. Employing a purposive sampling strategy, a sample of 100 students from Upper Basic 8 Social Studies were meticulously chosen to suit the requirements of the study. The instrument for data collection in this study was a Social Studies Mother Tongue Test (SSMTT), a comprehensive assessment designed to measure participants' academic proficiency. The validation process for the Social Studies Mother Tongue Test (SSMTT) underwent both face and content validity assessments, involving a panel of experts and experienced Social Studies educators. The reliability of the SSMTT was carried out using Cronbach alpha technique; to achieve this, 50 copies of the instrument were administered in a single administration. This quasi-experimental study was conducted in the 3rd term of the 2023/2024 academic session, lasting for six weeks, and involving the usage of just one lesson plan that was prepared with Urhobo language.

Treatment Procedure for the Treatment Groups

Subsequently, the Social Studies teacher who had undergone the orientation was given the responsibility of teaching the two topics in social studies, "marriage" and "drug abuse," using the Urhobo and administering the study's instruments during the pre-tests and post-tests. The control group was taught in English, the official language of instructions, without the incorporation of the mother tongue. Before initiating the lessons, a pre-test was administered to all subjects in the group, ensuring a baseline measurement of their knowledge. The data collected during the first test and post-test phases were subjected to rigorous statistical analysis to accurately investigate the significance and impact of mother tongue on the academic performance of students in Social Studies. This analytical process encompassed descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency such as the mean, and measures of data dispersion such as the standard deviation, which effectively answered the research questions. To test all null hypotheses, the researcher employed a t-test.

Results

Research Question 1: Will there be any difference in the post-test of social studies students taught with Urhobo language as mother tongue and those that were taught with English language?

Table 1 shows the result of the effect of using the Urhobo language as a mother tongue for teaching upper basic students' social studies. This was demonstrated by the difference in the academic performance of Social Studies Upper Basic students' taught with Urhobo language as mother tongue and those taught with English language. The post-test mean score for the

Urhobo group was 88.48, while that of the English language (control) group was 73.01. This difference clearly shows the positive effect of using the mother tongue for teaching, as it brings the students closer home. In addition, this group performance might be because Urhobo language is taught as the local language in the schools around the area. The effect of mother tongue on the academic performance of Upper Basic Social Studies students, as compared to a control group, differed. According to the data presented in the table, both the experimental group (taught in the Urhobo language) and the control group underwent a pre-test to assess their initial understanding of the topics. Before teaching in the mother tongue, the mean score of students in the Urhobo group was 70.40, with a standard deviation of 7.09, indicating moderate performance with some variability among students. The control group, which did not receive any treatment, was taught in the English language, had an increased mean pre-test score of 71.08 and a standard deviation of 6.68, suggesting a slightly higher baseline of understanding.

After teaching with the Urhobo language, the group recorded a dramatic performance improvement. A higher standard deviation of 8.26 in the post-test scores also suggests that, although the overall group improved, there was a broader range in academic success. Furthermore, the mean gain of 18.08 is a measure of the difference between pre-test and post-test scores, further giving support to the effectiveness of using mother tongue (Urhobo language) as compared to teaching with the official language (English). The significant impact of these results was tested in hypothesis 1.

Table 1. Academic Performance of Social Studies Students Taught with Urhobo Language as Mother Tongue and Those Taught with English Language.

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gained
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Treatment	50	70.40	7.09	88.44	8.26	18.08
Control	50	71.08	6.68	73.01	9.71	1.93

Research Question 2: How will socioeconomic status affect the usage of Urhobo language as mother tongue and post test scores of social studies students?

Table 2 shows the moderating effect of socioeconomic status on the Urhobo language and the academic performance of social studies students in Delta State. The table shows the difference in the mean scores of students from high and low socioeconomic status, with those from high socioeconomic status slightly higher than those of students from low socioeconomic background. Students from high socioeconomic status had a post-test mean of 90.28, as against the post-test mean of students from low socioeconomic status of 88.40. The high SES students experienced a slight increase in their academic performance. However, the mean gain for high SES students is around 2.12. This suggests that students from high SES experienced a greater mean gain score compared to those from low SES, and whether this difference is significant or not was determined by the results of hypothesis 2.

Table 2. Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Urhobo Language as Mother Tongue and Academic Performance of Upper Basic Students in Social Studies.

Posttest	SES	N	Mean	SD
	High	29	90.28	8.40
	Low	21	88.40	6.38

Testing of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no compelling difference in the post-test performance of social studies Upper Basic students who were taught with Urhobo language as mother tongue and those taught with English as the language of instruction.

Table 3. T-test Table Showing Significant Difference in the Academic Performance of Social Studies Students taught with Urhobo Language as Mother Tongue and those taught with English Language.

Group	N	Mean	Df	t-calculated	t-critical	Decision
Urhobo	50	88.74	98	-.280	.001	Rejected
Control	50	73.08		-.192	9.71	

Table 3 presents the test for hypothesis 1, which states that there is no compelling difference in the post-test performance of Social Studies Upper Basic students taught in Urhobo as their mother tongue and those taught in English. The results showed that the treatment variable (Urhobo language) had a statistically significant and convincing impact on students' academic performance, as indicated by a P value of .001, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This implies that the use of mother tongue contributed to a meaningful difference in academic performance between both groups, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which proposed that Urhobo language as mother tongue does not affect educational performance.

On the other hand, the control (English) group did not have a significant effect on academic performance, with a t calculated value of .192. This suggests that the control group had no significant impact on the students' academic performance. Overall, the findings suggest that incorporating mother tongue into Social Studies education can have a positive and significant effect on the academic performance of students in Upper Basic Social Studies.

Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic status does not moderate the effect of the Urhobo language as the mother tongue and post-test performance of social studies students.

Table 4. T-test Table Showing the Moderating Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Urhobo Language as Mother Tongue and Academic Performance of Upper Basic Students in Social Studies.

Group	N	Mean	df	t-calculated	t-critical	Decision
High	29	90.28	48	.596	.119	Accepted
Low	21	88.40		.624		

Table 4 presents the test for hypothesis 2, which posits that socioeconomic status does not moderate the effect of Urhobo language as the mother tongue on the academic performance of Upper Basic Students in Social Studies. The results showed a critical t-value of .119, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted. Also, a calculated value of .596 for students from high SES and .624 for students from low SES was obtained. The implication of this is that socioeconomic status does not have any moderating effect on Urhobo language as mother tongue and academic performance. Therefore, the usage of mother tongue to promote Social Studies students' academic performance transcends the socioeconomic status of the students, as children from poor or rich homes will adopt their mother tongue as long as they are exposed to it. However, other factors may moderate the impact of mother tongue.

Discussion

The first hypothesis presupposes that there is a profound difference in the academic performance of Social Studies students taught in Urhobo as their mother tongue compared to those taught in English. This highlights the crucial role of language in learning. Students who receive instruction in their mother tongue often perform better academically because they can easily comprehend complex concepts, relate new information to prior knowledge,

and express their ideas more effectively. According to literature, mother-tongue instruction enhances cognitive processing, reduces language barriers, and fosters active participation in the learning process, all of which contribute to improved academic outcomes. On the other hand, students taught with English as the language of instruction may struggle with comprehension, especially if they are not yet proficient in the language, leading to difficulties in grasping Social Studies concepts and applying them in assessments. This finding is true when compared to Eshiet & Okon (2023), Adegbite & Akindele (2021), and Ajayi & Adeyemo (2015).

Furthermore, learning in a familiar linguistic environment minimizes anxiety and enhances classroom engagement. When students understand the language of instruction, they are more likely to ask questions, engage in discussions, and develop higher-order thinking skills. In contrast, those taught in a second language often rely on rote memorization rather than deep understanding, which can hinder their academic performance. Additionally, the use of Urhobo in teaching Social Studies allows for cultural relevance, as students can better relate to historical and societal topics when explained in a language that aligns with their lived experiences. This finding aligns with the assertion of Cummins (2021), Oyetade (2022), and Nwokocha & Adejumo (2023), who argue that students learn more effectively when taught in their first language, as it supports their cognitive and academic development while gradually strengthening their second-language proficiency.

The second hypothesis revealed that socioeconomic status does not significantly moderate the relationship between Urhobo as a mother tongue and the academic performance of Upper Basic students in Social Studies, suggesting that language of instruction plays a more direct role in student achievement than financial or social background. This implies that regardless of whether students come from high-, middle, or low-income families, those taught in their mother tongue, Urhobo, tend to perform similarly. One possible explanation is that linguistic familiarity fosters comprehension and critical thinking, enabling students across different socioeconomic backgrounds to engage effectively with Social Studies content. This finding is in agreement with Heugh (2022), who presupposes that mother-tongue usage for educational purposes enhances the knowledge development and academic improvement, without considering the effect of socioeconomic background. On the contrary, it is different from that of Uchena & Bello (2020) and Oyetunde (2015). The findings imply that mother-tongue instruction reduces linguistic barriers that might otherwise disadvantage students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. By learning in Urhobo, students across different financial standings can better grasp abstract concepts, express themselves confidently, and actively participate in lessons.

Conclusion

The study concludes that students taught Social Studies using Urhobo as their mother tongue could perform significantly better than those taught in English. This finding underscores the effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction in enhancing students' comprehension, retention, and engagement in learning. Additionally, the study establishes that socioeconomic status does not significantly moderate the relationship between Urhobo language instruction and academic performance. This implies that the benefits of mother-tongue instruction are experienced across different economic backgrounds, reinforcing the idea that language familiarity is a more critical factor in academic success than financial status.

Educational policymakers should implement policies that encourage the use of Urhobo and other indigenous languages as mediums of instruction, particularly in early education, to improve students' understanding and performance. While parents and local communities should be encouraged to support mother-tongue learning at home to reinforce classroom instruction. This study contributes to educational research by providing empirical evidence

that mother-tongue instruction significantly enhances students' academic attainment especially in Social Studies. It also establishes that socioeconomic status do not influence the potency of applying learners' mother-tongue for social studies education, highlighting the universal cognitive benefits of learning in a familiar language.

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