

Original Research Article

Teachers' and Students' Willingness to Adopt English as the Exclusive Medium of Instruction in Public Secondary Schools in Zamfara West Senatorial Zone, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the willingness of teachers and students to adopt the English-only instruction method in public secondary schools in the Western Senatorial Zone of Zamfara State, Nigeria. The study is motivated by concerns about the effectiveness of English-only instruction in a multilingual environment where many learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, involving two hundred (200) students and twenty (20) teachers selected from twenty (20) public secondary schools, comprising ten (10) rural and ten (10) urban schools. Data were collected through questionnaires containing closed-ended questions and opportunities for respondents to provide reasons for their responses. The quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while the qualitative responses were examined thematically. The findings show that students recorded 1,399 “yes” responses compared with 640 “no” responses, while teachers recorded 208 “yes” responses compared with 147 “no” responses. The findings therefore indicate a generally positive attitude towards English-only instruction among the respondents. However, the responses also reveal challenges relating to students’ comprehension, limited English proficiency, inadequate teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, and the need for alternative teaching strategies. The study concludes that although English-only instruction is generally supported by teachers and students, its effective implementation requires adequate pedagogical support and sensitivity to learners’ linguistic backgrounds. It recommends regular teacher training, provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, and appropriate instructional strategies to support students with different levels of English proficiency.

Keywords: English-Only Instruction, English Language, Language of Instruction, Teachers, Students, Secondary Schools, Zamfara State.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigerian public secondary schools, English is officially the language of instruction and is essential to students’ academic and career advancement. Many schools enforce an English-only policy, which requires students to speak only English in class, in an effort to foster fluency. The efficacy of this approach is questionable, though, in states like Zamfara where children frequently come from non-English-speaking families and have little exposure to English outside the classroom. Nigeria’s multilingual situation has made the position of English in education a continuing issue of language policy, particularly because of the dominance of English alongside the country’s numerous indigenous languages (Adegbiya, 2004; Sani & Tsaure, 2016). Some contend that English-only instruction improves language proficiency, while others argue that it may cause fear, reduce participation, and create difficulties for learners with limited English proficiency.

The effectiveness of the English-only policy also raises pedagogical concerns. While some educators argue that full immersion in English promotes language acquisition, others suggest that rigid exclusion of the mother tongue (L1) can

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hinder understanding and create anxiety, particularly for students with low English proficiency (Krashen, 2009; Wang & Mansouri, 2017). Research on language education in Nigeria has also shown that the implementation of mother-tongue and bilingual education policies faces challenges, including teachers' attitudes, inadequate instructional materials, and the strong social and educational preference for English (Igboanusi, 2008; Iyamu & Ogiegbaen, 2007).

This research, therefore, investigates how English-only instruction influences students' spoken fluency and their willingness to communicate in English in public secondary schools in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Simasiku *et al.*, (2015) observed that students often resort to rote memorization or remain silent in class due to their inability to understand or articulate thoughts in English. In such contexts, code-switching between English and a familiar language may serve as an effective pedagogical strategy because it supports students' comprehension and communication when they lack sufficient proficiency in English.

Moreover, code-switching plays a crucial role in both social interaction and cognitive development. To appreciate Simasiku *et al.*'s (2015) perspective, one must understand how learners adapt when forced to study in a language in which they are not fluent. These learners often adopt either an achievement-oriented or surface-learning approach, both of which rely heavily on memorisation. In contrast, the deep-learning approach, characterised by a genuine desire to understand and find meaning, requires proficiency in the language of instruction. As Woodrow (2006) explains, deep learning is driven by an intrinsic motivation to master the content and uncover underlying significance, which may be inaccessible to learners struggling with the language of instruction.

Additionally, Simasiku *et al.*, (2015) describe code-mixing as a phenomenon closely related to code-switching. Code-mixing involves rapidly alternating between two languages within a single sentence, often without changing the topic. This linguistic blending may occur at various levels, including phonological, morphological, grammatical, or lexical. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, such practices demonstrate the continuing role of familiar languages in classroom communication despite the official dominance of English.

This research will investigate how fluency and willingness to speak English are affected by English-only instruction in selected public secondary schools in the Western Senatorial Zone of Zamfara State, Nigeria. The study examines how implementing an English-only policy affects students' spoken ability and their confidence or inclination to converse in English, given that English is the official language of instruction in Nigerian secondary schools.

Statement of the Research Problem

English is expected to be used as the medium of instruction from the upper primary level because it is the official language of administration and education in Nigeria. Consequently, many secondary schools adopt an English-only approach in an attempt to improve students' fluency and competence in the language. However, the implementation of this approach remains problematic, particularly in linguistically diverse communities where students use indigenous languages as their primary means of communication outside school. The dominance of English in Nigerian education has also raised concerns about the extent to which indigenous languages are accommodated within the educational system (Adegbiya, 2004; Igboanusi, 2008).

Many students in Zamfara public secondary schools continue to experience difficulties in speaking and understanding English, despite the use of English as the language of instruction. Low oral performance, reduced classroom participation, and limited confidence in speaking English may affect students' ability to benefit fully from classroom instruction. At the same time, the use of Hausa and other familiar languages in classroom interaction may provide learners with additional support for understanding lessons. However, the extent to which students and teachers are willing to adopt an English-only approach, and whether this willingness differs between rural and urban schools, requires further empirical investigation.

Although previous studies have examined language-of-instruction issues, code-switching, and the role of indigenous languages in Nigerian education, there is limited empirical attention to teachers' and students' willingness to implement English-only instruction in public secondary schools in Zamfara State, particularly across rural and urban settings. This study therefore investigates the impact of English-only instruction on students' fluency and teachers' and students' willingness to engage in English communication in selected public secondary schools in the Western Senatorial Zone of Zamfara State. It seeks to provide evidence that can contribute to more effective and context-sensitive language education strategies without marginalising students whose linguistic backgrounds differ from the language of instruction.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the willingness of teachers and students to use English-only instruction in public secondary schools in Zamfara State. The design is considered appropriate because the study relies on both numerical responses to questionnaire items

and respondents' explanations of the reasons behind their choices. The quantitative component provides measurable evidence of the respondents' views, while the qualitative responses provide additional insight into their experiences and perceptions of English-only instruction.

A total of two hundred (200) students and twenty (20) teachers were selected from twenty (20) public secondary schools in the Zamfara West Senatorial Zone. The schools comprised ten (10) rural and ten (10) urban schools, allowing the study to consider possible differences in the experiences of respondents across the two settings. The respondents were selected through purposive random sampling, as stated by the researchers, with the selected schools and participants serving as the study population for the investigation.

Data were collected through questionnaires administered to the selected students and teachers. The questionnaire focused on their experiences, perceptions, willingness, and challenges relating to English-only instruction. Respondents were required to indicate "Yes" or "No" to the questions and, where applicable, provide reasons for their responses. The use of these open-ended responses enabled the researchers to identify some of the factors underlying the respondents' choices.

The quantitative responses were organised and presented using frequencies and percentages to show patterns in the responses of rural and urban students and teachers. The qualitative responses were examined thematically by considering the reasons provided by respondents for their choices. The study also employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as part of its analytical perspective, particularly in considering the language-related experiences and discourses reflected in the respondents' responses. CDA is concerned with the analysis of written and spoken discourse and other forms of meaning-making, including signs and symbols (van Dijk, 1991; Obeng & Hartford, 2002; Chilton, 2004).

The data were subsequently presented in tables according to the four respondent categories: rural students, urban students, rural teachers, and urban teachers. The responses were then compared to identify patterns in the willingness to use English-only instruction and the challenges associated with its implementation. This approach provides a basis for examining the experiences of both teachers and students and for comparing the implementation of English-only instruction in rural and urban public secondary schools in the study area.

Data Presentation

The data for this research were derived from questionnaires administered to the teachers and students of selected public secondary schools in Zamfara State. For this research, only the questionnaires from Zamfara West Senatorial Zone were used as the sources of data. This is because the zone comprises six local governments, being the largest zone in the state. The other research will take care of the other senatorial zones when the data collection and analysis are completed.

Table 1: Rural Students' Responses

S/No	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you enjoy being taught through the English-only instruction method?	120	6
2	Do all your teachers use English-only instruction when teaching?	55	72
3	Does the English-only instruction method help you understand your lessons better?	100	27
4	Do you find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English?	86	37
5	Do you think the English-only instruction policy should be suspended?	32	92
6	Are you punished for speaking your mother tongue or another language during class?	45	47
7	Do you feel more confident speaking English because of the English-only instruction method?	114	13
8	Do your teachers encourage you to communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom?	122	0
9	Do you think using only English in class has improved your spoken and written English?	73	35
10	Do you think it is important that government should introduce additional method or improve on the English-only method of teaching?	109	15
Total		856	344

Table 2: Urban Students' Responses

S/No	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you enjoy being taught through the English-only instruction method?	42	45
2	Do all your teachers use English-only instruction when teaching?	47	39
3	Does the English-only instruction method help you understand your lessons better?	35	50
4	Do you find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English?	63	21
5	Do you think the English-only instruction policy should be suspended?	63	20
6	Are you punished for speaking your mother tongue or another language during class?	44	37
7	Do you feel more confident speaking English because of the English-only instruction method?	35	47

S/No	Question	Yes	No
8	Do your teachers encourage you to communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom?	77	8
9	Do you think using only English in class has improved your spoken and written English?	63	22
10	Do you think it is important that government should introduce additional method or improve on the English-only method of teaching?	74	7
Total		543	296

Table 3: Rural Teachers' Responses

S/No	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you enjoy using the English-only instruction method when teaching your students?	18	9
2	Do you encourage the continued use of the English-only instruction method in secondary schools?	20	6
3	Do you think the English-only instruction method improves students' academic performance?	18	7
4	Do your students find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English? Why?	23	2
5	Do you think the English-only instruction policy should be suspended?	12	19
6	Do some teachers in your school find it difficult to teach using only English?	18	7
7	Does your school take disciplinary action against teachers who fail to use English as the medium of instruction?	18	9
8	Are adequate teaching materials available to support English-only instruction?	11	16
9	Have you received any training on the effective use of English-only instruction?	9	15
10	Do you believe the English-only instruction method should remain the official language policy in secondary schools?	21	4
Total		168	94

Table 4: Urban Teachers' Responses

S/No	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you enjoy using the English-only instruction method when teaching your students?	3	7
2	Do you encourage the continued use of the English-only instruction method in secondary schools?	4	6
3	Do you think the English-only instruction method improves students' academic performance?	4	6
4	Do your students find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English?	7	3
5	Do you think the English-only instruction policy should be suspended?	3	6
6	Do some teachers in your school find it difficult to teach using only English? Why?	4	5
7	Does your school take disciplinary action against teachers who fail to use English as the medium of instruction?	3	6
8	Are adequate teaching materials available to support English-only instruction?	3	5
9	Have you received any training on the effective use of English-only instruction?	4	5
10	Do you believe the English-only instruction method should remain the official language policy in secondary schools?	5	4
Total		40	53

Table 5: Summary of Students' Yes & No Responses

Category	Category	Yes	No
1	Rural	856	344
2	Urban	543	296
Total		1399	640

Table 6: Summary of Teachers' Yes & No Responses

Category	Category	Yes	No
1	Rural	168	94
2	Urban	40	53
Total		208	147

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section is dedicated to the analysis of the responses received from students and teachers and the reasons for their choices. It reveals the reasons behind their responses and some of the challenges faced by teachers while implementing the policy in the Western Senatorial District of Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Rural Students' Responses and Reasons

A total of eight hundred and fifty-six (856) students responded "yes" in the rural schools, and some of the reasons they gave include the following: "because our teachers teach us well; we are learning a new language, so we enjoy it; because it is the rule of our school, so they maintain it; it really helps us to understand; because we understand English language; we are punished for speaking Hausa; it is the way of communication; they encourage us to speak anywhere; most of the students understand the lesson; government shall introduce additional method to improve our vocabulary," among others.

On the other hand, a total of three hundred and forty-four (344) students responded "no". They provided the following reasons: "because it is very hard to understand early without the mother tongue; they do not speak mother tongue in the class; it is a clear way of learning English; because it makes the lesson clear; it is a general language; it is very useful; modern means of communication nowadays is English," among others.

These responses indicate that students have different experiences with the English-only instruction method. While some students consider the method useful for improving their English proficiency and communication skills, others experience difficulties when the mother tongue is excluded from classroom interaction. This observation is consistent with Tsaure and Sani (2024), who discuss the significance of indigenous languages as media of instruction within Nigeria's multilingual educational environment. Their study highlights the importance of considering learners' linguistic backgrounds when developing and implementing language-of-instruction policies.

It is also clear that not all students benefit equally from the English-only instruction method in the selected secondary schools. In Table 1, for instance, the question reads: "Do all your teachers use English-only instruction when teaching?" Fifty-five (55) students responded "yes", while seventy-two (72) students responded "no". This should not be taken lightly because students' fluency in speaking English may be affected, especially in rural areas. The responses further suggest that students' understanding of the language used for instruction can influence their participation and learning experiences. This emphasizes the importance of language-of-instruction choices in ensuring effective educational outcomes within Nigeria's multilingual context.

Furthermore, the students' responses demonstrate that attitudes towards the language of instruction may influence their willingness to participate in learning activities. Students' interest in a language course is closely associated with their academic engagement and performance.

Urban Students' Responses and Reasons

A total of five hundred and forty-three (543) students responded "yes", and some of the reasons they gave include the following: "no, because it is a general language; they do, but some are using Hausa; using simple language is easy to understand; it is hard to understand without the mother tongue," among others.

On the other hand, a total of 296 students responded "no". They provided the following reasons: "*because I do not understand; because if they speak English we do not understand; mostly I do not understand*," among others. The responses from the urban students, like those of the rural students, demonstrate that the use of English as the sole medium of instruction does not produce the same experience for all learners. Some students appear to appreciate the use of English, whereas others experience difficulty understanding lessons when their familiar language is excluded. This supports the argument that language-of-instruction policies need to take into account the linguistic realities of Nigerian learners.

The findings also suggest that students' willingness to engage with a language is influenced by their level of familiarity with it. Sama and Sani (2018) explain that language and cognition are closely connected because cognitive processes are necessary for individuals to perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to linguistic expressions. From this perspective, difficulties in understanding the language of instruction may consequently affect students' ability to process and respond to classroom communication.

It needs to be made clear that some students refused to respond to some of the questions, while some chose "yes" or "no" but did not provide comments explaining their choices. That is why some percentages in the analysis do not add up to 100% in the total column, as reflected in the analysis as well.

Rural Teachers' Responses and Reasons

From the rural areas, a total of one hundred and sixty-eight (168) teachers responded "yes", and some of the reasons they gave include: "we are using different methods; we use group method in teaching; they have problems in mathematics, not in English; it is not the only way; we use that method for some classes; it is not adequate; we have not received any training," among others.

On the other hand, a total of ninety-four (94) teachers responded “no”. Some of the reasons they gave include: “it is a simple way to teach the students; we use the grammar method; it is not available to teachers in our schools; students are consistent in coming to school; it is not recommended; we are supported by the government; not all understand English; we use many instructional methods to improve students’ comprehension; it is not appropriate,” among others. The responses indicate that teachers do not necessarily depend exclusively on English-only instruction in their classrooms. Some reported using group work and other instructional methods, while others acknowledged that the English-only method is not always adequate for achieving effective comprehension. The teachers’ responses also demonstrate that the effectiveness of an instructional language is closely connected to learners’ ability to understand it.

Urban Teachers’ Responses and Reasons

From the urban areas, a total of forty (40) teachers responded “yes”, and some of the reasons they gave include: “it is available and adequate; yes, in some cases; it is the best way of understanding; by communicating with the students; they are current in communication; we encourage our teachers to use English language in our school; through interaction with others,” among others.

On the other hand, a total of fifty-three (53) teachers responded “no”. Some of the reasons they gave include: “they cannot comprehend; for easier understanding; lack of concentration; for the sake of students’ understanding; not invited for training; there is demonstration method; no adequate teaching materials; they are very good in their field,” among others.

The urban teachers’ responses further demonstrate that teachers may adopt different approaches depending on their perception of students’ needs and the availability of instructional resources. The use of alternative methods, demonstrations, and interaction with students suggests that English-only instruction may sometimes be complemented by other pedagogical strategies in order to facilitate comprehension. This is particularly important in multilingual educational settings where students may have different levels of proficiency in the language of instruction. Nigeria’s linguistic diversity creates significant challenges for educational planning and the implementation of language policies. Thus, the experiences reported by the teachers in this study demonstrate the practical challenges associated with applying a uniform language-of-instruction policy across different educational environments.

The teachers’ responses also relate to the importance of learners’ attitudes and engagement. Sani and Abdullahi (2020) establish a relationship between students’ interest and their academic performance. Students’ attitudes towards language learning can influence their interest and engagement. Their findings are relevant to the present study in demonstrating that students’ responses to a language-learning environment cannot be separated from their attitudes, interest, and willingness to participate.

The issue of language contact is also relevant to the findings of the present study. Tsaure and Sani (2016) demonstrate, in their study of Hausa and Fulfulde in Tsaure, that sustained contact between a dominant and a minority language can result in code-switching, code-mixing, borrowing, and other linguistic consequences. The present study similarly shows that students sometimes rely on Hausa when they experience difficulties with English. This suggests that the use of the mother tongue does not necessarily disappear simply because English has been established as the official medium of instruction.

The wide gaps between the “yes” and “no” responses in Tables 1, 2, and 3 call for concern and have important pedagogical implications. Woodrow (2006) explains that deep learning is driven by an intrinsic motivation to master content and uncover its underlying significance, which may be difficult for learners who struggle with the language of instruction. However, many learners face challenges because of limited proficiency in the language used for instruction (Silliman *et al.*, 2020). This issue is further compounded by the global power of English in the spheres of politics, business, and education (Wright, 2016).

The findings of the present study therefore suggest that although a considerable number of students and teachers support the English-only instruction method, the method presents challenges for some learners, particularly where students have limited proficiency in English. The findings should consequently be interpreted within the wider context of Nigeria’s multilingual educational environment. Rather than assuming that a single language of instruction will produce the same outcome for all learners, attention should be given to learners’ linguistic backgrounds, teachers’ preparedness, available instructional materials, and the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the majority of students and teachers in the rural and urban public secondary schools within the Zamfara West Senatorial Zone are willing to adopt the English-only instruction method. The findings show that students recorded 1,399 “yes” responses compared with 640 “no” responses, while teachers recorded 208 “yes” responses compared

with 147 “no” responses. This indicates a generally positive attitude towards the use of English as the medium of instruction, although some challenges affect its effective implementation.

The study also demonstrates that the English-only instruction method does not benefit all students equally. While some students reported that the method improves their understanding, vocabulary, confidence, and ability to communicate in English, others indicated that they experience difficulties understanding lessons when their mother tongue is excluded from classroom interaction. Similarly, teachers identified challenges including inadequate training, insufficient teaching materials, differences in students’ levels of English proficiency, and the need to employ alternative instructional methods. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of the policy depends not only on willingness to use English but also on appropriate pedagogical support and resources.

The study therefore recommends that the government should strengthen the implementation of the English language policy in public secondary schools while addressing the challenges identified by teachers and students. Teachers should be provided with regular training on effective English-medium instructional strategies, and schools should be equipped with adequate teaching and learning materials. At the same time, appropriate pedagogical consideration should be given to students’ linguistic backgrounds and comprehension needs. Such an approach would help promote English proficiency while ensuring that the language of instruction does not become a barrier to effective teaching and learning.

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