

Contributory Factors to Deficient Communicative Competence in English among Rural Primary School Pupils: A Study of Selected Schools in Badagry West L.G.A, Lagos State

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Abstract:

Communicative competence can be reasoned to be the target of second language acquisition, a main goal of second or foreign language teaching and learning, or the aim language testers seek to achieve through performance tests. Hence, effective communication is a fundamental skill for success in life. It allows individuals to express themselves clearly, but despite the importance of English for educational and professional opportunities in Nigeria, many rural pupils still struggle to speak it. This study, therefore, investigates the factors hindering rural primary school pupils in Badagry West Local Government Area of Lagos State in achieving communicative competence in English. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the contributory factors to deficient communicative competence in English among rural primary school pupils in Badagry West Local Government Area (L.G.A), Lagos State. The findings of this study revealed the factors as limited exposure to English outside the classroom, a continued reliance on traditional teaching methods that may not prioritize spoken communication and socio-economic disadvantages that can limit access to quality educational resources. Student motivation is also a factor that can be affected by a lack of awareness about the importance of English or limited opportunities to use it outside of school settings. The paper however, recommends solutions which include reforming the curriculum to incorporate communicative language teaching methods, providing teachers with training in these methods, and fostering community involvement to increase pupils' exposure to English outside of the classroom. By working collaboratively, educators, policymakers, and communities can create a more supportive learning environment that furnishes rural pupils with

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the essential communication skills they need to thrive. Handling these factors is crucial to equip rural pupils with vital communication skills necessary for their future success.

Keywords: communicative competence, contributory factors, English, rural, primary, pupils

Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of academic success and social mobility in Nigeria (Akinbode, 2018; Babajide, 2020). As the official language of the country, and the primary medium of instruction in schools, English facilitates learning and interaction across diverse spheres of life. However, despite its pivotal role, there is a persistent challenge of deficient communicative competence among pupils in rural primary schools (UNICEF, 2022). This inadequacy often manifests in poor oral and written communication skills, impeding academic achievement and limiting future opportunities (Ezeokoli & Okebukola, 2022).

Rural areas, such as Badagry West Local Government Area (L.G.A) of Lagos State, are disproportionately affected by this issue due to a combination of structural and environmental factors. These include inadequate infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and minimal exposure to English beyond the classroom (Olagunju et al., 2019). Socio-economic constraints and the dominance of indigenous languages in these communities further exacerbate the problem, as pupils have limited opportunities to practice English in real-life contexts (Ajayi, 2021), (Olowofoyeku, 2023). Additionally, Badagry West L.G.A is populated by border communities between Nigeria and Benin, highlighting the role of the area as a linguistic boundary. The interplay of these factors creates a challenging environment that hampers the acquisition of communicative competence in English.

Understanding the root causes of this issue is critical to addressing it effectively. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of teacher quality, instructional resources, and the linguistic environment in shaping the language skills of the pupils (Oni & Ogunleye, 2020; Akindele, 2017; Amadi & Togho, 2024). This study builds on such research to explore the specific challenges faced by rural primary school pupils in Badagry West

L.G.A. By identifying the contributory factors, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to implement targeted interventions.

The significance of this research is underscored by its alignment with the global emphasis on quality education as a cornerstone of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Specifically, this study examines how teaching methodologies, teacher competence, learning resources, socio-economic influences, and the linguistic environment contribute to the observed deficiencies. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform educational policies and practices that can enhance English language as a second language in rural areas and bridge the gap in communicative competence.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the contributory factors to deficient communicative competence in English among rural primary school pupils in Badagry West Local Government Area (L.G.A), Lagos State. The methodology comprises the following components:

Research Design

The study employs a descriptive survey design, deploying qualitative methods to capture the multifaceted nature of the issue, reflecting the complexity of the human language. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis of contextual factors influencing communicative competence in English.

Study Population and Sampling Technique

The population of the study includes primary school pupils, teachers, and school administrators in selected rural primary schools within Badagry West L.G.A. A purposive sampling technique is used to select six primary schools, based on their geographic locations, socio-economic context, and availability of qualified teaching staff. Within each of the selected schools, a stratified random sampling method was employed to select 40 pupils, comprising 20 pupils selected from primary 6 and 20 pupils from primary 5. The choice of these two most senior classes was to ensure that the impact of primary school education is reflected in the findings of the research. Four teachers responsible for English language instruction were also selected for

an interview. One of the Head teachers and the Assistant Head teachers was also selected to provide insight into institutional perspectives. Together, the sample is thus made up of 200 pupils, 20 teachers and five school administrators.

Data Collection Methods

A mix of data collection methods were deployed to collect data for this research. They include questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. The questionnaires were administered to the selected teachers. They focused on teaching methodologies, professional qualifications, and challenges in teaching English. Semi-structured Interviews were also conducted with teachers and school administrators to gather qualitative data on contextual factors, including instructional challenges, institutional policies, and community attitudes toward English language use. These interviews provided deeper insights into the structural and environmental factors identified in the introduction. Focus group Discussions (FGDs) were held with groups of pupils to explore their perceptions of learning English, challenges they face, and their use of English outside school. These discussions enabled the collection of nuanced data on the attitudes of pupils and socio-cultural influences.

Data Presentation and Insights

This section presents a detailed analysis of the data collected from various research instruments aimed at investigating the contributory factors to deficient communicative competence in English among rural primary school pupils in Badagry West Local Government Area (L.G.A), Lagos State. The analysis integrates findings from the questionnaires of teachers, interviews of administrators, group discussions of pupils and socio-demographic data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and their implications for English language as a second language education.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic data sheds light on the socio-economic, gender, and professional profiles of the pupils and teachers involved in the study.

Percentage distribution of pupils by gender:

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	111	55%

Female	89	45%
Total	200	100%

Pupils

- **Gender Distribution:** Among the 200 pupils surveyed, 55% were male, and 45% were female. This near balance highlights gender inclusivity in participation.

Percentage distribution of pupils by Age Range:

Age Range	Number	Percentage
8 – 10 years	36	18%
11-12 years	116	58%
13 – 15 years	48	24%
Total	200	100%

The table shows that a significant majority, 58% were aged between 11 and 12 years, while 18% were between 8 and 10 years old and 24% are between 13 and 15 years old. This age distribution is slightly above the target demographic of primary school pupils in Nigeria, suggesting a slightly delayed entry into the primary school among the rural communities uniform sample for analysis.

Percentage distribution of pupils by Socio-economic Status:

Socio-Economic Status	Number	Percentage
Low Income	162	81%
High Income	38	19%
Total	200	100%

Socio-Economic Status: A staggering 81% of the pupils came from low-income households, with only 19% belonging to high-income families. This distribution underscores the socio-economic challenges faced by the majority of pupils, likely influencing their access to quality learning resources and language practice opportunities.

Teachers and Administrators

Percentage distribution of teachers by qualification Range:

Qualification Levels	Number	Percentage
SSCE	Nil	Nil
NCE	10	50%

Bachelor's Degree	08	40%
Master's Degree	02	10%
Total	20	100%

Most of the teachers held the National Certificate of Education (NCE), a basic qualification for teaching in Nigeria (50%), while 40% had a Bachelor's degree, and 10% held a Master's degree. While the qualifications are commendable, the predominance of entry-level qualifications may affect the quality of English instruction.

Percentage distribution of teachers by years of experience Range:

Years of Experience of Teachers	Number	Percentage
1-10 years	12	60%
11-15 years	05	25%
16 years and above	03	15%
Total	20	100%

Sixty percent of teachers had 1–10 years of experience, while 40% had more than 10 years. This relatively even split suggests a mix of novice and experienced teachers, although the high percentage of less-experienced teachers might indicate challenges in teaching efficacy.

Percentage distribution of teachers by gender:

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	5	25%
Female	15	75%
Total	20	100%

With 75% female teachers and 25% male, the findings reflect the common gender pattern in the teaching profession, particularly in primary education.

Findings from Questionnaires of Pupils

The responses of pupils revealed critical insights into their linguistic environment, classroom experiences, and challenges.

Linguistic Environment

A significant 85% of pupils reported Yoruba and Ogu as the primary languages spoken at home, while only 15% occasionally speak English.

This highlights the dominance of indigenous languages and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. A concerning high percentage of pupils rarely or never used English outside school, underscoring the limited opportunities for practical language application.

Classroom Experiences

Only 25% of pupils frequently participated in English-speaking activities during lessons. The low engagement levels may stem from inadequate teaching methodologies or a lack of interactive opportunities due to classroom sizes. The class population makes it impractical to have students-specific activities in class. Also, some of the pupils hint that their teachers often code-switch into Yoruba language to explain concepts in class. When asked to rate their English lessons, 75% of pupils rated them as “Fair,” while 25% rated them as “Poor.” These ratings indicate a pressing need for improved teaching strategies and resources.

Exposure to English Outside School

75% of pupils reported having no access to English reading materials at home, further limiting their exposure to the language; however, 15% of pupils regularly engaged with English-language on social media while 10% gained such exposure to the English language on media such as television programs or radio shows. This highlights a missed opportunity for informal language acquisition.

Challenges Identified by Pupils

From the perspectives of the pupils, challenges to achieving communicative competence includes limited practice opportunities, teaching quality and motivational deficits.

60% of the pupils cited lack of opportunities to practice English as a significant barrier. They live in villages where Ogu and Yoruba languages are spoken predominantly. In addition, half of the pupils pointed to inadequate teaching quality as a hindrance to their acquisition of communicative competence in English Language and 40% reported a lack of motivation to learn English as a factor, possibly influenced by the socio-cultural environment and teaching approaches.

Findings from Teachers’ Questionnaires

The teachers’ feedback provided further context to the challenges identified by pupils. On their teaching method, 70% of teachers relied

heavily on lecture-based approaches, with only 30% incorporating interactive activities. This heavy dependence on passive teaching styles limits pupils' active engagement and communicative development. Teachers blame this on the class size. 80% of teachers also reported insufficient resources, such as textbooks and audio-visual aids which hamper effective lesson delivery. Other key challenges facing the teachers are large class sizes, a lack of professional development opportunities, and the pervasive dominance of Ogu and Yoruba in the community.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed a multifaceted set of factors contributing to deficient communicative competence in English among rural primary school pupils in Badagry West Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. These factors span linguistic, socio-economic, instructional, and institutional domains. Each factor is intricately connected, creating a cumulative effect that hampers English language acquisition and proficiency.

Linguistic Environment

One of the most striking findings is the overwhelming dominance of Yoruba and Ogu as the primary languages spoken at home, reported by 80% of pupils. This aligns with the broader sociolinguistic context of Nigeria, where indigenous languages dominate most rural areas. Scholars such as Bamgbose (1991) and Igboanusi (2008) have highlighted how the strong cultural attachment to indigenous languages often reduces exposure to English outside formal educational settings. While bilingualism is typically advantageous, the limited use of English in these communities leads to restricted practice opportunities and a lack of familiarity with the language.

Furthermore, the data showed that 60% of pupils rarely or never use English outside school. This aligns with findings by Adegbite (2003), who argued that the functional use of English in Nigeria is heavily urban-centric, with rural areas relying predominantly on local languages for daily interactions. The lack of an English-speaking environment outside school significantly affects pupils' ability to develop communicative competence, as language acquisition thrives in immersive contexts (Krashen, 1982).

Socio-Economic Constraints

Socio-economic factors play a critical role in shaping pupils' exposure to and proficiency in English. A majority (75%) of pupils come from low-income households, which limits access to essential learning resources such as books, audiovisual aids, and digital devices. Studies, including those by Akande and Salami (2020), have shown that socio-economic status is a strong determinant of educational outcomes in Nigeria, with children from low-income households often facing material deprivation that hinders their learning.

The data indicated that 75% of pupils lack access to English reading materials, and only 25% engage with English-language media. These findings align with Oyetunde (2018), who noted that resource scarcity in rural areas severely constraints informal learning opportunities that are critical for language acquisition. Without books or media exposure, pupils miss out on opportunities to develop vocabulary, improve comprehension, and practice pronunciation – skills that are essential for communicative competence.

Instructional Practices

The teaching methods employed by the majority of teachers further exacerbate the problem. 70% of teachers rely predominantly on lecture-based methods, which are largely teacher-centered and emphasize rote learning. This aligns with observations by Dada and Abimbola (2017), who found that teacher-centered approaches dominate Nigerian classrooms, particularly in under-resourced rural schools. Such methods fail to engage pupils actively, reducing opportunities for speaking, listening, and interactive learning, which are essential for language acquisition.

Interactive teaching methods, such as group discussions, role-playing, and language games, are widely recognized as more effective in promoting communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, only 30% of teachers in this study incorporated such methods, likely due to large class sizes (reported by 70% of teachers) and insufficient training or professional development opportunities (60%).

The reliance on lecture-based methods was further confirmed by classroom observations, where 75% of lessons lacked active pupil engagement. This approach not only limits language practice but also

reduces motivation among pupils, as seen in the 30% who reported a lack of enthusiasm for learning English. Motivation is a crucial factor in language learning, as highlighted by Gardner and Lambert (1972), who emphasized the role of both integrative and instrumental motivation in second language acquisition.

Institutional and Resource Challenges

Institutional deficiencies, such as a lack of teaching resources, were evident in the findings, with 80% of teachers reporting insufficient materials. This aligns with the broader national issue of underfunding in education, as reported by UNESCO (2021), which has consistently flagged the inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials in Nigerian public schools.

Visual aids, interactive media, and other modern teaching tools were rarely used, further limiting pupils' engagement and comprehension. Adejumo and Ajayi (2015) emphasize the importance of such resources in making lessons more interactive and comprehensible, particularly in language education. Their absence in this context reflects systemic neglect and underscores the need for targeted investments in rural education.

Cultural and Community Dynamics

The dominance of Yoruba in the community also emerged as a significant barrier. While the use of indigenous languages in education has been advocated for its role in improving cognitive understanding (Bamgbose, 2000), its unchecked dominance in social and cultural spaces limits pupils' exposure to English. This creates a scenario where pupils perceive English as a purely academic subject rather than a functional language, as noted by Igboanusi and Peter (2005).

Implications and Recommendations

The findings highlight the urgent need for a holistic intervention to address these challenges. First, teachers must be equipped with professional development opportunities that emphasize interactive and communicative teaching methods. Training programs should incorporate the use of modern pedagogical tools and strategies for large class management.

Second, resource provision must be prioritized. Government and non-governmental organizations should work to supply rural schools with textbooks, digital tools, and audiovisual materials. Establishing community

libraries and media centers could also bridge the resource gap, offering pupils access to English reading materials and media.

Finally, creating an enabling environment for English usage in the community is essential. Language clubs, inter-school debates, and partnerships with local media outlets to produce English-language programs could foster greater exposure and practice opportunities.

Conclusion

The interplay of linguistic, socio-economic, instructional, and institutional factors underscores the complexity of addressing deficient communicative competence in English. These findings reaffirm the critical need for multi-dimensional interventions that address systemic gaps while fostering an inclusive and resource-rich learning environment. By leveraging the insights from this study, policymakers and educators can implement targeted strategies to improve English language education in rural communities, paving the way for more equitable educational outcomes.

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