EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

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Keywords:	Abstract
mother tongue interference, multilingualism, educational management, language acquisition, English instruction, teacher preparedness, school leadership, policy implementation, language pedagogy, Nigeria.	*This study investigates the role of educational management strategies in addressing mother tongue interference in multilingual primary school classrooms. Mother tongue interference has long been a barrier to English language acquisition in Nigeria, particularly in areas where indigenous languages dominate pupils' early social and linguistic experiences. Drawing from both educational management theory and language pedagogy, this study explores the administrative responses to this challenge, the preparedness of teachers, and the effectiveness of language policies implemented at the school level. Three research purposes and corresponding questions guided the study: to examine the extent of mother tongue interference in English language instruction, to assess the preparedness of teachers in managing language interference, and to evaluate the role of educational management in mitigating language challenges in multilingual classrooms. Survey research design was adopted using questionnaires distributed to English and Igbo language teachers as well as school heads across selected schools. Data was analyzed using descriptive tables that addressed each research question. The findings indicate a lack of structured interventions by school managers and inadequate teacher training as key contributors to persistent L1 interference. The study recommends school-led language support frameworks, regular professional development, and increased parental involvement to mitigate the problem. These insights contribute to developing a holistic and practical approach to language education in Nigeria's multilingual context, highlighting issues of language acquisition, educational management, teacher preparedness, school policies, language pedagogy, and the impact of mother tongue interference in primary education.*

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of language education, especially in linguistically diverse countries like Nigeria, mother tongue interference continues to impede students' mastery of English. Pupils often enter the school system already entrenched in their first language (L1), making it difficult to acquire the nuances of a second language (L2), particularly when the medium of instruction is English. This phenomenon has led to widespread phonological, syntactic, and semantic errors in pupils' English usage (Okoye, 2020).

Mother tongue interference is not solely a linguistic issue but one that intersects with educational leadership. School management plays a pivotal role in creating environments where linguistic diversity is not a barrier to learning but a strength to be harnessed (Ameh, 2021). A shift from traditional reactive strategies to proactive educational management is needed to address this challenge.

The absence of strategic planning and leadership in many schools allows mother tongue interference to flourish unchecked. Many administrators fail to design or implement effective language support programs tailored to multilingual settings (Olaoye, 2020). The failure to integrate language pedagogy into school-wide decision-making reflects a gap in leadership practices.

Furthermore, effective school leadership is central to the integration of inclusive language learning strategies. Leaders who understand the sociolinguistic realities of their school environments are better equipped to guide teachers and influence pupils positively (Chukwuma, 2022). These leaders can enforce the use of resource materials, provide relevant teacher training, and develop policies that encourage bilingual support.

Educational managers must also address teacher preparedness. Many teachers are not adequately trained to manage L1 interference within the classroom (Ukwuoma, 2023). School heads must not only identify these gaps but also create frameworks for continuous language-based professional development. When school leaders actively support English and mother tongue teachers through coordinated programs, the outcome is more holistic language development. Classroom dynamics are further complicated by parental roles. Some children receive their only exposure to English at school, while their homes reinforce L1 structures (Nwachukwu, 2021). Effective school managers are therefore instrumental in engaging parents through sensitization programs and home-based language support strategies.

Moreover, school leadership must invest in monitoring and evaluation. Without tools to assess language progress and challenges, managers cannot provide timely interventions. Data-driven decision-making in school management ensures that issues like mother tongue interference are continuously tracked and addressed (Eze, 2024).

Therefore, this research highlights the intersection of educational management and language pedagogy, aiming to offer strategic insights for reducing L1 interference in

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multilingual classrooms through administrative innovation.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the persistent impact of mother tongue interference on English language acquisition, many school management teams lacked coordinated strategies to combat the challenge. This resulted in a continued decline in learners' oral and written English performance, particularly in multilingual communities where English was learned as a second or third language. The failure to implement effective management responses, including teacher training, curriculum adaptation, parental engagement, and consistent language support mechanisms, left many pupils struggling to attain the expected language proficiency levels. Without timely, targeted, and research-informed interventions from educational leaders, the gap between pupils' language needs and their academic success continued to widen. This study therefore sought to investigate the roles and responsibilities of school managers in mitigating mother tongue interference and to identify strategic educational management practices that supports improved English language outcomes in multilingual classrooms.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the common forms of mother tongue interference observed among primary school pupils.
2. To explore how school managers currently respond to language challenges in multilingual classrooms.
3. To identify effective school management strategies for minimizing mother tongue interference.

Research Questions

1. What are the common forms of mother tongue interference observed among primary school pupils?
2. How do school managers currently respond to language challenges in multilingual classrooms?
3. What school management strategies are effective in minimizing mother tongue interference?

Literature Review

Concept of Mother Tongue Interference

Mother tongue interference refers to the influence of a learner's first language on their use of a second language. It is a widely recognized linguistic phenomenon, especially prevalent in multilingual societies. According to Adekunle (2020), interference manifests primarily in pronunciation, sentence structure, and vocabulary usage. In Nigeria, many pupils produce phonological errors due to the absence of equivalent English sounds in their native languages.

In addition, syntax transfer from the L1 often leads to ungrammatical English sentences. For example, the Igbo language's structure often influences how pupils construct English phrases (Anene, 2021). This hinders communication and affects pupils' academic performance. Similarly, lexical interference, such as code-switching, is rampant and usually goes unnoticed by poorly trained teachers (Ijeoma, 2022).

Another consequence of interference is fossilization, where incorrect patterns become

fixed due to repeated use and lack of corrective feedback (Bello, 2023). This becomes difficult to reverse in the absence of conscious pedagogical strategies or school-wide interventions. Effective educational management must ensure these errors are caught early through monitoring and support.

Mother tongue interference also contributes to low self-esteem among pupils who struggle to meet linguistic expectations. Chukwuemeka (2021) observed that pupils often avoid public speaking or creative writing tasks due to fear of making errors. Addressing this challenge requires not only linguistic knowledge but emotional and psychological support from school leadership.

The home environment plays a role as well. As Onwumere (2023) notes, language use at home reinforces pupils' dominant linguistic habits. When English is not spoken at home, it becomes harder for pupils to develop fluency. Schools must thus bridge this gap by strengthening their roles in early language formation and reinforcement.

In essence, mother tongue interference is a multifaceted issue that cannot be addressed through teaching alone. It requires a school-wide culture that prioritizes language learning across departments, schedules, and home-school partnerships (Udeh, 2024).

Concept of Educational Management and Language Pedagogy

Educational management involves planning, organizing, and supervising educational processes for improved learning outcomes. Within the context of language pedagogy, school managers are tasked with fostering environments that support language learning (Nduka, 2020). Unfortunately, language planning is often left to language teachers, excluding school heads from vital implementation roles.

School managers are instrumental in coordinating inter-departmental collaboration. When English and mother tongue teachers work in synergy under the direction of visionary leaders, they can identify linguistic patterns that hinder or support language growth (Maduka, 2021). Language development thus becomes a collective goal.

Also, effective managers allocate resources wisely. A study by Nnamdi (2022) reveals that schools with adequate reading materials, audio-visual tools, and language labs perform better in literacy development. When management prioritizes these investments, it enhances teaching and learning outcomes.

Supervision is another vital aspect of educational management. Continuous classroom observation, as supported by Okonkwo (2023), helps track linguistic progress and challenges. Managers can then make timely interventions by modifying timetables, assigning mentors, or organizing retraining sessions for language teachers.

The curriculum should also reflect language goals. In most multilingual schools, curriculum overload reduces the time allocated to English instruction. Educational managers can realign schedules to prioritize core language skills without neglecting other subjects (Iloabuchi, 2021).

Furthermore, professional development is essential. Teachers must be trained not just to teach but to manage multilingual dynamics. Uzochukwu (2022) emphasizes that school heads who organize regular workshops foster a culture of continuous growth.

The oversight of community participation is yet another instance of neglect. Parents need to be incorporated in all aspects for more effective language development strategies. School administrators in the field can set up reading clubs, circulate language newsletters, and even organise parent-teacher forums focusing on English practice at home (Okeke, 2023).

As stated before, well-planned and directed inclusive educational management will remain central in accomplishing appropriate approaches and techniques in language pedagogy. Combining management techniques at the instruction level with teaching approaches in the class is crucial to mitigating mother tongue influence (Ezeugo, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The basis of this study is Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; adapted in education by Bass & Riggio, 2020). The theory focuses on inspiring leaders who motivate visionary changes in their institutions. In educational management, transformational leaders are those who foster a culture of participation among all constituents and enhance the use of language to foster innovative teaching at all levels. This moves the discussion toward the assumption that educational leaders can impact language policies and outcomes by redefining practices and cultures within institutions.

Empirical Review

A study by Okonkwo (2018) examined the effects of school leadership practices on language instruction in rural Nigerian primary schools. The research found that effective administrative planning and language policy enforcement significantly improved pupils' English language proficiency. Both the current study and Okonkwo's focus on how educational management influences language learning. However, while Okonkwo explored rural schools in Northern Nigeria, the present study is localized to Enugu East Local Government Area, emphasizing the administrative response to mother tongue interference specifically in multilingual settings.

In another study, Musa and Adeyemi (2020) investigated the impact of teacher training programs on managing first language interference in Lagos State primary schools. Their findings revealed that consistent in-service training equipped teachers with better strategies for handling L1 interference. Like the current study, their work recognizes teacher preparedness as a critical factor. However, the present research extends its scope to include school-level policy and management strategies, not just teacher competencies.

Chukwuma (2022) explored parental involvement and its correlation with children's English language development in southeastern Nigeria. Results showed that pupils whose parents actively supported English language use at home displayed reduced signs of mother

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tongue interference. While both studies stress the importance of community involvement, the current research integrates parental involvement within a broader educational management framework that includes teacher readiness and school leadership efforts.

Methodology

The survey design approach was chosen because it worked effectively to understand present practices and beliefs about mother tongue interference in educational settings with multiple languages. The research occurred at multilingual primary educational institutions within southeastern Nigeria, where the indigenous language spoken by the community continues to thrive along with growing worries about student proficiency in the English language.

The research participants consisted of both English language and Igbo language educators together with the school administrators. The research sample consisted of sixty participants who were chosen through purposive sampling to include exclusively individuals who played direct roles in language teaching as well as school administration. A total of 60 participants consisting of 20 English teachers and 20 Igbo teachers alongside 20 school heads took part in the study from different government and private schools based in the chosen region.

The research data collection method consisted of using a structured questionnaire containing both Likert-scale items together with open-ended questions to obtain participants' complex opinions. The questionnaire gathered details regarding mother tongue interferences together with school managers' present responses and their assessment of existing educational methodologies.

The research period took two weeks to complete data administration while school administrators provided their cooperation. Clear guidelines in addition to support were given to maintain both the consistency and reliability of the instrument during the data collection process.

The researcher analysed the gathered data using descriptive statistics before presenting them through frequency tables that answered all three research questions. The statistical approach made it simpler to interpret patterns and trends as well as shared experiences of the participants, which served as a solid base for the research discussion and conclusion sections.

Results

Tables on Mother Tongue Interference and Educational Management Strategies

Table 1: Common Forms of Mother Tongue Interference

Form of Interference	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Phonological Errors	24	40%
Grammatical Deviations	15	25%
Direct Translaion	18	30%
Lexical Borrowing	12	20%

Table 2: School Managers' Response to Language Challenges

Management Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Language Monitoring Programs	21	35%
Teacher Training Workshops	27	45%
Intervention Committees	6	10%
No Formal Response	6	10%

Table 3: Strategies for Reducing L1 Interference

Suggested Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bilingual Instruction Support	30	50%
Parent Engagement Programs	18	30%
Curriculum Adjustment	24	40%
Mentorship for Language Teachers	27	45%

Discussion

The results of this research provide a valuable understanding of the patterns, attitudes, and tactical responses relative to mother tongue influence dealing with educational multilingualism.

Table 1demonstrates that the most frequent type of interference was phonological errors - 40%. This suggests that a lot of students pronounce English words according to the phonetic rules of their mother tongue. This relates to earlier research where second language learners were found to be suffering from distorted pronunciation due to deep phonological transfer. Direct translation (30%) also seems to be the case for a lot of pupils which suggests that they reason in English, but interpret the meaning of English words and express them through the grammar and rules of their first language which results in inept or incorrect expressions. Also,

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grammatical deviations (25%) and lexical borrowing (20%) illustrate the extent to which mother tongue interference suppresses the learners' grammar and vocabulary skills. These findings substantiate that the problem of language interference continues to be one of the central issues in the teaching of languages in these multilingual settings.

Table 2 focuses on the response strategies employed by school managers. The most common initiative was teacher training workshops (45%), suggesting that capacity building is prioritized as a primary measure to mitigate language learning difficulties. Language monitoring programs (35%) were also notably used, emphasizing a focus on continuous oversight and correction. However, only 10% reported using intervention committees, and an equal number of respondents indicated no formal response to language interference. This highlights a management gap in some schools, where either there is no awareness or structured policy to tackle the issue. The presence of uncoordinated or absent responses undermines long-term efforts to address the root causes of language learning struggles.

Table 3 outlines the strategies recommended for reducing L1 interference. Bilingual instruction support (50%) emerged as the most preferred strategy, reflecting an educational shift toward leveraging the mother tongue as a bridge to English mastery, rather than treating it solely as a barrier. Mentorship for language teachers (45%) was also highly rated, indicating the perceived value of experienced language instructors guiding their peers in effective classroom approaches. Curriculum adjustment (40%) and parent engagement programs (30%) were moderately suggested, revealing a broader understanding that language learning should be supported both structurally (through syllabus reforms) and socially (through active parental roles).

In summary, the data not only confirm the persistent influence of L1 on English language acquisition but also highlight the urgent need for holistic and coordinated management practices. Schools that adopt proactive strategies such as bilingual support and continuous teacher development are more likely to mitigate the effects of language interference and enhance learners' academic performance.

Conclusion

Educational managers are key agents in bridging the gap caused by mother tongue interference. By adopting structured, inclusive, and innovative leadership practices, schools can significantly enhance English language proficiency.

Recommendations

1. School heads should implement bilingual support systems with trained facilitators.

2. Teacher training workshops on multilingual instruction should be frequent and monitored.

3. Parent engagement should be institutionalized through regular language awareness programs.

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