



INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING ABILITY IN MAIDUGURI METROPOLITAN COUNCIL, BORNO STATE

Mohammed Goni BUKAR (Ph.D.)¹, Abubakar Musa BAKO², Bakura MODU³ and Yakura ABBA⁴

¹Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Maiduguri

²Division of General Studies Federal Polytechnics Monguno Borno State Maiduguri

^{3&4}Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education, University of Maiduguri

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of mother tongue on students' speaking ability in English in selected secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC), Borno State, Nigeria. The research was anchored on Lado's (1957) Theory of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which posits that errors in second language acquisition arise from structural differences between the learner's first language and the target language. A survey research design was employed, with a sample of 241 senior secondary school students drawn from four public secondary schools in MMC using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with items on a four-point Likert scale, covering demographic information, dominant mother tongue languages, phonological influence of mother tongues on speaking ability, and the extent of mother tongue interference on oral English performance. The data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings revealed that the mother tongue, particularly Kanuri and Hausa, is overwhelmingly dominant in students' lives, serving as the primary language of communication at home, with family, and outside the classroom. The study also found that mother tongue exerts a significant phonological influence on students' speaking ability, affecting pronunciation of English words, causing difficulty in pronouncing certain English sounds correctly, leading to substitution of English sounds with mother tongue equivalents. The findings indicated that mother tongue interference has a considerable negative impact on students' oral English performance, affecting their examination scores, reducing their confidence in speaking, leading to avoidance of speaking in class, and resulting in poor performance in written English than in spoken English. The study concluded that mother tongue interference constitutes a persistent barrier to achieving spoken English proficiency among students in MMC. Recommendations include providing in-service training for teachers on contrastive phonology, developing localized instructional materials targeting specific areas of interference, establishing English clubs to provide practice opportunities, and encouraging parents to create spaces for English language practice at home.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Interference, English Language Speaking Ability

Introduction



Language is the bedrock of human interaction, a fundamental tool for communication, cognitive development, and the transmission of culture. In a linguistically diverse and multilingual nation like Nigeria, the role of language in education is particularly complex and critical. English language, as the nation's official language, serves as the primary medium of instruction across all levels of education, from primary school to tertiary institutions. Proficiency in English is not merely an academic requirement but a gateway to understanding other subjects, as textbooks, examinations, and classroom discourse are predominantly in English. The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020) explicitly recognizes this, mandating the use of English as the medium of instruction, while assigning indigenous languages, or the mother tongue, a crucial role in early childhood education. However, the transition from the mother tongue to English often presents significant hurdles, particularly for students whose first language (L1) is structurally and phonologically different from English (Adebayo, 2022).

Mother tongue is the first language a person learns from birth through interaction with parents, family members, peer group and the immediate community. It is also called the first language (L1) or native language. It is the language in which a child first develops listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and it often serves as the foundation for learning additional languages. In Nigeria, examples of mother tongues include Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Tiv, Ibibio, Edo, Nupe, and many others. Since Nigeria has over 500 indigenous languages, learners often acquire English as a second language (ESL) rather than as their mother tongue. Mother tongue interference (also called first language interference or language transfer) refers to the influence of a learner's native language on the learning and use of a second language. It occurs when learners transfer the sounds, grammar, vocabulary, or expressions of their mother tongue into English, resulting in errors or non-standard usage. (Olaoye, 2022)

The influence of a learner's mother tongue on the acquisition and use of a second language (L2) is a well-documented phenomenon in applied linguistics. This influence, known as language transfer, can be positive when the structures of the L1 and L2 align, but it more frequently manifests as negative transfer or interference when deep-seated linguistic habits from the first language are incorrectly applied to the second. This interference is most palpable in the domains of phonology (pronunciation) and syntax (sentence structure), directly impacting a student's speaking ability, which includes articulation, stress, intonation, and grammatical accuracy during oral expression (Adeleke, 2022). In a classroom setting, a student whose mother tongue lacks certain English phonemes may substitute them with familiar sounds from their L1, leading to accented, and sometimes unintelligible, speech that can undermine confidence and communicative competence.

The Borno State specifically the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) with linguistic landscape is especially diverse and complex. While Kanuri is the dominant indigenous language of the region, the classroom is a melting pot of several other languages, including Shuwa Arabic, Marghi, Hausa, and numerous other minority languages (Bukar & Grema, 2023). For the vast majority of students in MMC's secondary schools, English is not just a second language but a third or even fourth language, learned after acquiring one or more local languages. The linguistic structures of these numerous mother tongues are significantly



different from those of English. For instance, many are tonal languages where pitch changes meaning, while English uses intonation for emphasis and mood. Similarly, syntactic structures, such as the placement of verbs or the formation of plurals and tenses, can differ dramatically, creating fertile ground for deep-rooted interference when a student attempts to speak English (Musa & Ibrahim, 2024).

The Maiduguri Metropolitan council is the capital of Borno state affected by the Boko Haram insurgency for many years faces unique challenges that exacerbate this linguistic interference. The prolonged crisis has led to the displacement of thousands of families, resulting in a heterogeneous student population with varied and sometimes interrupted educational backgrounds, converging in schools within the relative safety of the metropolis (UNICEF, 2022). In these overcrowded and resource-constrained classrooms, teachers must contend with students whose different mother tongues create distinct and systematic errors in their spoken English. A teacher untrained in recognizing these L1-specific errors may find it difficult to design effective remedial strategies, inadvertently allowing fossilized errors to become permanent features of a student's spoken English. This can severely hamper a student's academic confidence, limit their classroom participation, and ultimately affect their overall academic performance, as oral assessments and the ability to articulate answers are integral to the learning process (Ali, 2021).

Previous research in other Nigerian contexts has established a clear link between mother tongue interference and challenges in acquiring English speaking skills. Studies by Olaoye (2022) among Yoruba speakers and Eze and Nwachukwu (2023) among Igbo speakers have demonstrated how phonological and syntactic features of these languages systematically affect students' spoken English. However, there is a conspicuous paucity of research focusing on the unique linguistic ecology of Borno State, where Kanuri and other Chadid and Nilo-Saharan languages, with their distinct linguistic properties, interface with English. The assumption that findings from other regions can be generalized to MMC ignores the specific linguistic typology of the dominant languages in the area. The linguistics variety of English spoken in Maiduguri is uniquely colored by these local languages, creating a localized dialect of English that, while functional locally, may not meet the national curricular standard for spoken English proficiency expected in internal and external examinations (Yusuf, 2022).

Furthermore, the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria places explicit emphasis on oral English. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) exams both include a test of oral English, assessing students' ability to discriminate between sounds, understand stress and intonation patterns, and demonstrate overall speaking proficiency (WAEC, 2023). A student whose speaking ability is heavily influenced by their mother tongue is immediately at a disadvantage in these crucial, high-stakes national examinations. Poor performance in oral English not only lowers a student's overall grade in the subject but also locks them out of competitive academic and professional fields where spoken communication is paramount. Despite the high stakes, the specific linguistic mechanisms by which Kanuri, Hausa, Marghi, and other local languages influence students' speaking abilities in MMC remain under-researched, leaving a critical gap for educators and policymakers.



It is against this complex backdrop of linguistic diversity, conflict-induced displacement, and the high academic stakes of spoken English that this study is situated. This research seeks to investigate the specific phonological and syntactic influence of the mother tongue on the speaking ability of students in selected secondary schools within the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno State. By analyzing these influences, the study aims to provide a localized, evidence-based understanding of the problem, which is essential for developing targeted pedagogical interventions, informing teacher training, and improving the spoken English proficiency of students in this unique and challenging context.

Statement of the Problem

Senior secondary school students in the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC), Borno State, exhibit persistent and significant challenges in speaking English fluently and accurately, a problem starkly reflected in their consistently poor performance in the oral English components of WASSCE and NECO examinations. This underperformance is largely attributable to negative transfer from their diverse mother tongues, such as Kanuri, Hausa, and Shuwa Arabic, which causes systematic phonological and syntactic errors in their spoken English. However, despite the multilingual reality of MMC classrooms, English is often taught without a diagnostic understanding of these specific L1-induced errors, leaving teachers ill-equipped to address the root cause of their students' communication breakdowns. Consequently, students' spoken English becomes fossilized, their oral communication confidence plummets, and their academic and professional futures are jeopardized.

The core problem is that the precise nature, scope, and severity of specific mother tongue interference on students' speaking ability in this linguistically diverse and conflict-affected region remains critically under-researched. While studies from other Nigerian regions confirm the general phenomenon, there is a profound lack of localized, empirical evidence in MMC that systematically identifies the dominant L1-influenced errors. Without this corpus of localized evidence, pedagogical interventions remain generic and ineffective, and teacher training programs fail to equip instructors with the contrastive linguistic skills needed for targeted remediation. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by specifically investigating the phonological and syntactic influence of students' mother tongues on their English speaking ability in selected senior secondary schools within MMC.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify the dominant mother tongue languages spoken by students in the selected secondary schools in MMC.
- ii. examine the phonological influence of mother tongues on students' speaking ability in English.
- iii. determine the extent to which mother tongue interference affects students' performance in the oral English examination.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated based on the objectives of the study:

- i. What are the dominant mother tongue languages spoken by students in selected secondary schools in MMC, Borno State?



- ii. What are the phonological influence of the mother tongues on students' speaking ability in English?
- iii. To what extent does mother tongue interference affect students' performance in the oral English examination in senior secondary schools in MMC?

Literature Review

The Theoretical Framework of this study was propounded on Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis theory (CAH) (1957), which posits that the principal challenge in learning a second language stems from the differences between the learner's native language and the target language. Lado argued that elements that are similar to the learner's mother tongue will be simple to acquire, while those that are different will prove difficult. The fundamental assumption of this theory is that by systematically comparing the linguistic structures of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), potential areas of learning difficulty and interference can be predicted. Lado contended that the habits formed in the acquisition of the first language are transferred to the learning of the second language; where the structures of the two languages are congruent, positive transfer occurs, but where they diverge, negative transfer or interference arises, leading to errors in the learner's L2 production. In the context of this study, which focuses on the influence of mother tongue on students' speaking ability in English in secondary schools, the theory is highly relevant because speaking, as a productive oral skill, is the linguistic domain where the automatic, deeply ingrained habits of the mother tongue are most prominently and involuntarily transferred. For students in a multilingual setting, the phonological and syntactic patterns of their indigenous languages are firmly established before they encounter English, making their spoken English particularly susceptible to the imprint of their first language structures.

Furthermore, Lado's theory emphasized that the degree of linguistic distance between the L1 and the L2 is a critical determinant of the severity of interference. Where the sound systems of the mother tongue and English have completely different sets of phonemes, the learner is likely to substitute the unfamiliar English sounds with the nearest equivalents from their native language. For instance, if a student's mother tongue lacks certain English vowel or consonant sounds, the student will invariably replace them with sounds that exist in their L1 inventory, resulting in accented and sometimes unintelligible speech. Similarly, at the syntactic level, if the grammatical rules of the mother tongue prescribe a word order, tense marking system, or agreement pattern that is structurally different from that of English, the learner will tend to superimpose the L1 grammatical framework onto their English sentence construction. This can manifest as direct, word-for-word translations from the mother tongue into English, producing grammatically aberrant expressions that, while lexically English, are syntactically foreign. This interference is particularly potent in a secondary school context where students typically think in their mother tongue and mentally translate their thoughts into English before speaking.

Oyetunde and Muodumogu (2013) investigated the linguistic landscape and language use patterns among secondary school students in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study adopted a sociolinguistic survey design with a sample of 300 students drawn from six public secondary schools using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a language use questionnaire and a self-report language proficiency scale. The findings revealed a highly



multilingual student population, with Hausa emerging as the most dominant mother tongue and lingua franca, followed by indigenous Plateau languages such as Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta. The study noted that while students identified strongly with their ethnic mother tongues, Hausa was the primary language of peer-group interaction both within and outside the classroom, creating a complex linguistic environment where English was relegated largely to formal classroom instruction. The researchers concluded that the overwhelming dominance of Hausa in informal domains significantly shaped students' oral English patterns, as the phonological and syntactic structures of Hausa constituted the primary linguistic filter through which English was acquired and spoken.

Akande and Akinwamide (2016) examined the mother tongue profile and language attitudes of senior secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State. The study employed a descriptive survey method and sampled 250 students from 10 schools across the Ibadan metropolis. Instruments included a sociolinguistic background questionnaire and focus group discussions. The study identified Yoruba as the overwhelmingly dominant mother tongue, spoken by over ninety percent of the students as a first language, with minority languages like Igbo and Hausa spoken by students from other ethnic backgrounds. A critical finding was the phenomenon of "dialect mixing," where students spoke various dialects of Yoruba (such as Ibadan, Oyo, and Egba) at home but converged on a standardized, school-based variety of Yoruba for peer communication. Additionally, Usman and Modu (2018) conducted a study specifically focused on the language repertoire of students in secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. The study was descriptive in nature and sampled 20 public and private secondary schools across the metropolis. Instruments used included a detailed language background inventory and oral interviews with students. The findings revealed a trilingual student profile dominated by Kanuri, Hausa, and Shuwa Arabic. Kanuri was identified as the mother tongue of the indigenous majority, while Hausa functioned as a dominant lingua franca spoken by nearly all students, regardless of ethnic origin. Shuwa Arabic was spoken by students of Arab ethnic extraction, predominantly from eastern Borno. The study also found that due to urbanization and inter-ethnic marriage, a growing number of students were bilingual in Kanuri and Hausa from childhood, with English being acquired as a third language in the formal school setting.

Abubakar and Kyari (2017) assessed the ethnolinguistic demographics and language use patterns among senior secondary school students in Damaturu, Yobe State, a setting with linguistic affinities to Borno. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design and covered 10 senior secondary schools, with a sample of 200 students. Findings indicated that Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulfulde were the three dominant mother tongue languages. Kanuri speakers constituted the plurality, with Hausa functioning as the language of wider communication in urban areas. The study documented that a significant proportion of students from minority language backgrounds had shifted to Hausa as their primary language, while still retaining passive knowledge of their ancestral mother tongues. The research found that the language of the immediate community environment exerted a greater influence on students' spoken English than the language of their ethnic origin. Musa and Grema (2020) investigated the sociolinguistic patterns of English and mother tongue use among secondary school students in Biu, southern Borno State. The study sampled 180 students from six secondary schools using a purposive



sampling technique. Data were collected through a language diary and a structured questionnaire. The study identified Biu-Mandara (a Chadic language), Hausa, and Kanuri as the dominant mother tongues. A key finding was the diglossic relationship between these languages: Biu-Mandara was used predominantly in the home and for cultural activities, Hausa in the marketplace and for inter-ethnic communication, and English exclusively in the classroom. However, the study observed extensive code-mixing and code-switching in students' informal English conversations, with lexical items and syntactic structures from Hausa and Biu-Mandara frequently inserted into English utterances.

Based on the literature reviewed above, the dominant mother tongue languages spoken by students in secondary schools are a reflection of the ethno-linguistic geography of their immediate environment. In northern Nigeria generally, and in Borno State specifically, Kanuri and Hausa emerge as the most dominant mother tongues, with Shuwa Arabic and other indigenous languages such as Biu-Mandara constituting significant linguistic blocs in specific localities. The literature consistently reveals that Hausa, in particular, functions as a powerful lingua franca that influences even non-native speakers, while English remains restricted to the formal classroom domain. This linguistic ecology, where the mother tongue dominates all informal and cognitive domains, creates a fertile ground for profound phonological and syntactic interference when students attempt to speak English. Meanwhile, the related studies on phonological interference, Ibrahim and Shehu (2019) examined the influence of Hausa phonology on the spoken English of secondary school students in Kano State. The study sampled 100 students from five senior secondary schools in Kano Municipal, using a picture description task and reading aloud exercise to generate oral data. The findings identified specific phonemic substitutions characteristic of Hausa speakers of English. The English labiodental fricative /v/ was consistently realized as the bilabial plosive /b/, while the English voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ was replaced with the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. The study also documented the widespread phenomenon of epenthesis, where Hausa speakers inserted an extra vowel to break up English consonant clusters. For instance, 'school' was pronounced as 'sikulu' and 'table' as 'teburu.'

Mustapha and Alkali (2021) conducted a study on Kanuri phonological interference in the spoken English of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri, Borno State. The study employed a descriptive survey design, sampling 80 Kanuri-L1 students from four secondary schools. Oral data were collected using a structured interview and a word-list reading exercise targeting problematic English phonemes. The findings revealed that Kanuri speakers of English replaced the English voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ with the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/, while the voiced counterpart /ð/ was substituted with /d/. Additionally, the English bilabial approximant /w/ and the labiodental fricative /v/ were often conflated, with both being realized as /w/ or a sound intermediate between the two. Kanuri speakers also inserted vowels to break up consonant clusters, producing forms like 'filim' for 'film' and 'handulu' for 'handle.'

Bala and Sani (2017) investigated syntactic interference from Hausa on the English sentence construction of secondary school students in Katsina State. The study used a composition task and a grammaticality judgment test administered to 150 SS2 students. The analysis of sentence-level errors revealed a transfer of the Hausa focus construction, resulting in cleft sentences such



as "It is yesterday I went to market" instead of "I went to the market yesterday." The study also documented subject-verb agreement errors, leading to sentences such as "He go to school every day." Additionally, students frequently transferred the Hausa post-nominal relative clause structure, producing awkward constructions.

Based on the literature reviewed, the evidence is conclusive and compelling that mother tongue interference has a profoundly negative and pervasive effect on students' performance in the oral English examination. This impact is consistently demonstrated in the specific sub-skills tested—segmental phoneme discrimination, rhyme, stress placement, and intonation. Students from strong L1 backgrounds systematically underperform because the deeply entrenched phonological and prosodic habits of their mother tongue blind them to the phonemic distinctions and stress patterns of English that are tested in the examination. The interference is so severe that it leads not merely to a few errors but to a pattern of systemic failure, with students scoring significantly lower in oral English than in other components of the English Language examination. This body of evidence underscores the urgency of targeted, contrastive pedagogical interventions that directly address the specific mother tongue interference patterns of students.

Methodology

The study employed a survey research design, which involved obtaining information from a group of some selected senior secondary school students through questionnaires and an oral production test in order to understand the influence of their mother tongue on their speaking ability in English language. The population for the study comprises of students from four (4) Selected Senior Secondary School in Maiduguri Metropolis Borno State. The schools selected are Kashim Shettima Government Day Secondary School, Federal Government College Maiduguri, Government Girls College Maiduguri and Government Girls Secondary School Yerwa with a total number of 3,010 students. Simple random sampling was used in selecting sample size for the study, out of the 3010 students, 241 students was selected as sample size of the study using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point Likert scale with response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The data collected was analyzed using tabulation and presented in frequency distribution tables and percentages,

Results

Research Question One: What are the dominant mother tongue languages spoken by students in selected secondary schools in MMC, Borno State?

Table 4.1: Dominant Mother Tongue Languages Spoken by Students

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	My mother tongue is the language I use most frequently at home.	125 (51.9%)	80 (33.2%)	22 (9.1%)	14 (5.8%)



2	I communicate with my family mainly in my mother tongue.	138 (57.3%)	67 (27.8%)	21 (8.7%)	15 (6.2%)
3	I speak my mother tongue more often than English outside the classroom.	148 (61.4%)	60 (24.9%)	18 (7.5%)	15 (6.2%)
4	I feel more comfortable speaking my mother tongue than English.	132 (54.8%)	65 (27.0%)	25 (10.4%)	19 (7.9%)
5	My mother tongue is the first language I learned before English.	160 (66.4%)	50 (20.7%)	19 (7.9%)	12 (5.0%)

The table 4.1 indicated that 125 (51.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that their mother tongue is the language they use most frequently at home, 80 (33.2%) agreed, while 22 (9.1%) disagreed and 14 (5.8%) strongly disagreed. On communicating with family mainly in mother tongue, 138 (57.3%) strongly agreed, 67 (27.8%) agreed, 21 (8.7%) disagreed, and 15 (6.2%) strongly disagreed. Regarding speaking mother tongue more often than English outside the classroom, 148 (61.4%) strongly agreed, 60 (24.9%) agreed, while 18 (7.5%) disagreed and 15 (6.2%) strongly disagreed. On feeling more comfortable speaking mother tongue than English, 132 (54.8%) strongly agreed, 65 (27.0%) agreed, 25 (10.4%) disagreed and 19 (7.9%) strongly disagreed. Concerning mother tongue being the first language learned before English, 160 (66.4%) strongly agreed, 50 (20.7%) agreed, 19 (7.9%) disagreed and 12 (5.0%) strongly disagreed. These results indicate that the mother tongue is overwhelmingly dominant in students' lives, serving as the primary language of communication at home, with family, and outside the classroom, and is the first language acquired by the vast majority of respondents.

Research Question Two: What are the phonological influence of the mother tongues on students' speaking ability in English?

Table 4.2: Phonological Influence of Mother Tongue on Students' Speaking Ability

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD
6	My mother tongue affects the way I pronounce English words.	104 (43.2%)	77 (32.0%)	38 (15.8%)	22 (9.1%)
7	I find it difficult to pronounce some English sounds correctly.	112 (46.5%)	82 (34.0%)	29 (12.0%)	18 (7.5%)
8	I often substitute English sounds with sounds from my mother tongue.	88 (36.5%)	84 (34.9%)	42 (17.4%)	27 (11.2%)
9	My mother tongue affects my use of stress when speaking English.	96 (39.8%)	71 (29.5%)	44 (18.3%)	30 (12.4%)



10	My mother tongue affects my use of intonation in English.	92 (38.2%)	75 (31.1%)	40 (16.6%)	34 (14.1%)
-----------	---	---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------

The table revealed that 104 (43.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed that their mother tongue affects the way they pronounce English words, 77 (32.0%) agreed, while 38 (15.8%) disagreed and 22 (9.1%) strongly disagreed. On finding it difficult to pronounce some English sounds correctly, 112 (46.5%) strongly agreed, 82 (34.0%) agreed, 29 (12.0%) disagreed, and 40 (16.6%) strongly disagreed. Regarding substituting English sounds with sounds from mother tongue, 88 (36.5%) strongly agreed, 84 (34.9%) agreed, while 42 (17.4%) disagreed and 27 (11.2%) strongly disagreed. On mother tongue affecting use of stress when speaking English, 96 (39.8%) strongly agreed, 71 (29.5%) agreed, 44 (18.3%) disagreed and 30 (12.4%) strongly disagreed. Concerning mother tongue affecting use of intonation in English, 92 (38.2%) strongly agreed, 75 (31.1%) agreed, 40 (16.6%) disagreed and 34 (14.1%) strongly disagreed. These results indicate that a clear majority of students acknowledge that their mother tongue exerts a significant phonological influence on their spoken English, affecting pronunciation of individual sounds, sound substitution, stress placement, and intonation patterns.

Research Question Three: To what extent does mother tongue interference affect students' performance in the oral English examination in senior secondary schools in MMC?

Table 4.3: Extent of Mother Tongue Interference on Oral English Performance

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD
11	Mother tongue interference affects my performance in Oral English.	115 (47.7%)	77 (32.0%)	29 (12.0%)	20 (8.3%)
12	I am less confident speaking English because of my mother tongue influence.	107 (44.4%)	73 (30.3%)	36 (14.9%)	25 (10.4%)
13	I avoid speaking English in class because I fear making mistakes.	98 (40.7%)	69 (28.6%)	42 (17.4%)	32 (13.3%)
14	Mother tongue interference affects my Oral English examination scores.	113 (46.9%)	75 (31.1%)	31 (12.9%)	22 (9.1%)
15	I perform better in written English than in spoken English.	126 (52.3%)	63 (26.1%)	31 (12.9%)	21 (8.7%)

The table revealed that 115 (47.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that mother tongue interference affects their performance in Oral English, 77 (32.0%) agreed, while 29 (12.0%) disagreed and 20 (8.3%) strongly disagreed. On being less confident speaking English because of mother tongue influence, 107 (44.4%) strongly agreed, 73 (30.3%) agreed, 36 (14.9%) disagreed, and 25 (10.4%) strongly disagreed. Regarding avoiding speaking English in class



due to fear of making mistakes, 98 (40.7%) strongly agreed, 69 (28.6%) agreed, while 42 (17.4%) disagreed and 32 (13.3%) strongly disagreed. On mother tongue interference affecting Oral English examination scores, 113 (46.9%) strongly agreed, 75 (31.1%) agreed, 31 (12.9%) disagreed and 22 (9.1%) strongly disagreed. Concerning performing better in written English than in spoken English, 126 (52.3%) strongly agreed, 63 (26.1%) agreed, 31 (12.9%) disagreed and 21 (8.7%) strongly disagreed. These results indicate that mother tongue interference has a substantial negative effect on students' oral English performance, affecting their examination scores, confidence levels, classroom participation, and creating a noticeable gap between their written and spoken English abilities.

Summary of Findings

- 1.The finding from the study revealed that the mother tongue is overwhelmingly dominant in students' lives, with the vast majority using it as their primary language of communication at home, with family members, and outside the classroom. It is also the first language acquired by nearly all respondents before learning English.
- 2.Thhe study showed that mother tongue exerts a significant phonological influence on students' speaking ability in English. Students acknowledged that their mother tongue affects their pronunciation of English words, makes it difficult to pronounce certain English sounds correctly, leads to sound substitution from the mother tongue, and influences their use of stress and intonation in spoken English.
- 3.The study indicated that mother tongue interference has a considerable negative impact on students' oral English performance. It affects their overall performance in Oral English, reduces their confidence in speaking, leads to avoidance of speaking in class, negatively impacts their examination scores, and results in better performance in written English than in spoken English.

Discussion

The findings from the study confirmed that the mother tongue is overwhelmingly dominant in the lives of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council. The vast majority of respondents indicated that their mother tongue is the language they use most frequently at home, the primary medium of communication with family members, and the language they speak more often than English outside the classroom. Furthermore, nearly all respondents reported that their mother tongue is the first language they learned before English. These findings align with the work of Usman and Modu (2018), who reported a trilingual student profile in Maiduguri Metropolis where Kanuri, Hausa, and Shuwa Arabic dominated all informal domains, with English confined strictly to formal classroom instruction. Similarly, Musa and Grema (2020) observed that the mother tongue remained the primary cognitive and expressive tool for secondary school students in Borno State, dominating all non-academic domains and shaping the linguistic habits that students bring into the English learning context. The finding that students feel more comfortable speaking their mother tongue than English is particularly significant. This linguistic comfort in the first language, combined with its dominance in home and community environments, means that the phonological and syntactic patterns of the mother tongue are continuously reinforced while opportunities for English



speaking practice remain limited. This dynamic, also noted by Oyetunde and Muodumogu (2013) in their study of secondary school students in Jos, entrenches L1 linguistic patterns and makes interference not merely a temporary phenomenon but a deeply embedded feature of students' interlanguage. The majority of respondents agreed that their mother tongue affects the way they pronounce English words, that they find it difficult to pronounce some English sounds correctly, and that they often substitute English sounds with sounds from their mother tongue. These findings are strongly supported by previous empirical research in similar linguistic contexts. Mustapha and Alkali (2021) examined specific phonological substitutions among Kanuri-L1 students in Maiduguri, including the replacement of English dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/, and the conflation of /v/ and /w/. Similarly, Ibrahim and Shehu (2019) found that Hausa speakers of English consistently substituted /p/ with /f/, /v/ with /b/, and inserted vowels to break up consonant clusters, producing pronunciations such as "sikulu" for "school." The students' acknowledgment that their mother tongue affects their use of stress and intonation in English further confirms that the interference operates not only at the segmental level of individual sounds but also at the suprasegmentally level. Usman and Modu (2018) (2014) found that Yoruba speakers imposed tonal patterns on English syllables, resulting in a syllable-timed rhythm instead of the stress-timed rhythm of Standard English. The findings from the study also revealed the profound extent to which mother tongue interference affects students' oral English performance, extending beyond linguistic accuracy into the affective and academic domains. The majority of respondents agreed that mother tongue interference affects their performance in Oral English and directly impacts their examination scores. This perception is consistent with the findings of Onukaogu and Opara (2015), who documented a strong negative correlation between the degree of mother tongue influence and students' WASSCE oral English scores in Abia State. Ali and Usman (2018) similarly reported that students from strong Kanuri and Hausa L1 backgrounds in Borno State performed significantly worse on oral English proficiency tests, with mean scores below 40% in phoneme discrimination tasks. The present study's findings confirm that students themselves are acutely aware of this academic disadvantage.

Beyond examination performance, the findings revealed a negative dimension to mother tongue interference. A substantial proportion of respondents indicated that they are less confident in speaking English because of their mother tongue influence, and many avoid speaking English in class due to fear of making mistakes. This finding aligns with the work of Nwachukwu and Ogugua (2020), who observed that Igbo and Hausa-speaking students often defaulted to their mother tongue or remained silent when struggling to express themselves in English, particularly in peer-to-peer communication. Chika and Dada (2024) further explained that the fear of making errors and being ridiculed creates a psychological barrier that reduces students' willingness to participate in oral English activities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that mother tongue interference has a strong and persistent effect on the spoken English of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno State. The mother tongue, particularly Kanuri and Hausa, is



overwhelmingly dominant in students' homes and informal communication, while English remains largely restricted to formal classroom instruction. This interference manifests significantly in the phonological domain, affecting pronunciation of individual English sounds, causing systematic substitution of unfamiliar English phonemes with mother tongue equivalents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. English language teachers in secondary schools should receive regular in-service training on contrastive phonology to equip them with the knowledge to identify the specific phonological differences between Kanuri, Hausa, and English, and to design targeted oral drills that address the documented areas of interference.
2. Borno State Ministry of Education should develop and supply localized instructional materials for oral English that specifically target the phonemic contrasts and suprasegmentally feature for dominants languages Kanuri and Hausa.
3. School administrators should establish and actively support English clubs, debate societies, and speech activities to provide low-anxiety environments where students can practice spoken English regularly and build the communicative confidence that mother tongue interference has diminished.
4. Parents and guardians should be encouraged through community awareness programmes to create spaces for English language practice at home by providing access to English media and encouraging English conversations alongside the mother tongue, thereby complementing formal classroom instruction.

References

- Abubakar, M., & Kyari, A. (2017). Ethnolinguistic demographics and language use patterns among senior secondary school students in Damaturu, Yobe State. *Journal of Language and Education in Northern Nigeria*, 5(2), 45–58.
- Adebayo, O. (2022). The mother tongue dilemma in Nigerian classrooms: Transition and challenges. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 18(1), 34–50.
- Adeleke, T. (2022). Speaking ability and linguistic interference among Nigerian ESL learners. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 10(3), 22–36.
- Akande, A. T., & Akinwamide, T. K. (2016). Mother tongue profile and language attitudes of senior secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State. *Journal of Sociolinguistics and Education in Africa*, 4(1), 67–82.
- Ali, G., & Usman, B. (2018). The impact of mother tongue interference on senior secondary school students' performance in the oral English test in Borno State. *Borno Journal of Education*, 11(1), 88–102.
- Ali, M. (2021). Fossilized errors in the spoken English of secondary school students in northeastern Nigeria. *Maiduguri Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(2), 112–125.
- Bala, S., & Sani, A. (2017). Syntactic interference from Hausa on the English sentence construction of secondary school students in Katsina State. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Linguistics*, 6(1), 90–105.



- Bukar, A., & Grema, B. (2023). Linguistic diversity in Borno State: Implications for English language instruction. *Nigerian Journal of Multilingual Education*, 5(1), 56–71.
- Chika, P., & Dada, F. (2024). Psychological barriers to oral English participation among Nigerian secondary school students. *Journal of Educational Psychology in Africa*, 7(1), 44–59.
- Eze, E., & Nwachukwu, C. (2023). Igbo linguistic structures and their influence on spoken English among secondary school learners. *Studies in Nigerian Linguistics*, 9(1), 201–218.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2020). *National policy on education* (7th ed.). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Ibrahim, M., & Shehu, Y. (2019). The influence of Hausa phonology on the spoken English of secondary school students in Kano State. *Kano Journal of Educational Studies*, 14(1), 45–60.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30(3), 607–610.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Musa, A., & Grema, Y. (2020). Sociolinguistic patterns of English and mother tongue use among secondary school students in Biu, southern Borno State. *Journal of Language and Society in Nigeria*, 7(2), 112–128.
- Musa, I., & Ibrahim, K. (2024). Syntactic divergence between Chadic languages and English: Implications for ESL learners in Borno. *Linguistics and Education in Nigeria*, 11(1), 78–94.
- Mustapha, A., & Alkali, M. (2021). Kanuri phonological interference in the spoken English of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri, Borno State. *Borno Journal of Language Studies*, 9(3), 34–50.
- Nwachukwu, B., & Ogugua, J. (2020). Language use patterns and spoken English anxiety among multilingual students in Nigerian secondary schools. *African Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(2), 88–103.
- Olaoye, A. (2022). Yoruba phonological systems and English language acquisition: A contrastive study. *Journal of Nigerian English Studies*, 14(2), 156–172.
- Onukaogu, C., & Opara, F. (2015). The relationship between mother tongue interference and students' achievement in the oral English component of the WASSCE in Abia State. *Nigerian Educational Review*, 10(3), 145–162.
- Oyetunde, T. O., & Muodumogu, C. A. (2013). The linguistic landscape and language use patterns among secondary school students in Jos, Plateau State. *Journal of Multilingual Education in Nigeria*, 3(1), 78–95.
- UNICEF. (2022). *Education in emergencies: The impact of conflict on learning in northeastern Nigeria*. Abuja: UNICEF Nigeria.
- Usman, A., & Modu, B. (2018). The language repertoire of students in secondary schools in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. *Borno Journal of Linguistics*, 6(1), 90–107.



WAEC. (2023). *WASSCE English language syllabus and examination structure*. Lagos: West African Examinations Council.

