



Academic Performance of Public and Private Primary School Pupils in Written English in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Dr. William J. UBULOM¹ & Mary I. ADOKI²

**¹Department of Business Education
Faculty of Technical and Science Education
Rivers State University of Science and Technology
Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

**²Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Technical and Science Education
Rivers State University of Science and Technology
Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis with emphasis on their gender. This study employed comparative research design. The target population for this study consists of 3,021 subjects (that is, 1,490 male and 1,531 female pupils) from primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The breakdown of the population is 1,538 (that is, 712 male and 826 female) pupils from public primary schools and 1,483 (that is, 778 male and 705 female) pupils from private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The sample size for this study consists of 907 subjects, which is a representative of 30% of the target population. The breakdown of the sample size is 462 (that is, 214 male and 248 female) pupils from public primary schools and 445 (that is, 233 male and 212 female) pupils from private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Simple random sampling procedure was employed to arrive at the sample size. The instrument used in gathering data for the study was the teacher-made test; the record of result scores from the primary school pupils' cumulative record folder of public and private primary schools in Port Harcourt. It is a standardized test. The mean and standard deviation scores were extracted and presented in appropriate tables to answer the three (3) research questions. To determine the extent of significant difference that existed between the independent and dependent variables at 0.05 alpha level, the researchers employed t-test to analyse the data and test the hypothesis. The researchers discovered low level of academic performance of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools and high level of academic performance of the private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The researchers conclude that male and female pupils in private primary schools perform academically better in written English than male and female pupils in public primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Key Words: Academic Performance, English Language, Written English, Public Primary Schools, Private Primary Schools

INTRODUCTION

One of the most extensively researches of learned motive is the need for achievement. According to Witting & Belkin (1990), individuals who seek a very high standard of performance for

themselves have probably internalized achievement as a personal goal. However, people probably develop their need to achieve because of the social approval of success or the punishment of failure. This is also being implied in learning English Language as a school subject.

English is a language that has occupied a prominent place in our national life. The place of English Language in the life of our nation cannot be overstressed. Tiffen (1969) as cited by Douglas (2000) captured the pervading role of English Language in Nigeria when he asserted that:

English can now be regarded as one of the major African languages,
So widespread is its uses and so essential is it as a tool in everyday life.
In many countries, it is the official language, the national language of
administration, law, the national press and commerce ... of political unity.
Indeed, without English could at present be a little education above a very
elementary level (p. 52).

A critical examination of the above assertion made over four decades ago indicates that no concrete evidence has been provided to show that the statement is not true. In essence, it is true that English Language still occupies a pride of place in the life of the Nigerian nation. It still serves as the language of communication and interaction amongst the various ethnic groups in Nigeria in spite of all efforts to make Nigerians learn any one of the three dominant languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

In Nigeria, English Language is in fact, an official language. It is a national language used at the national assembly and in every state of the federation for legislative deliberations, administration, judiciary and law, the national press, commerce and trade as well as all levels of education for instructional delivery. At the primary level of education, English Language is placed as one of the compulsory subjects every pupil in the primary school is expected to pass. In order to further endorse the importance of English Language in our educational system, it is widely used as a means of communication at every level of the Nigerian educational system. Though the medium of instruction in the primary school shall be language of the environment for the first three years, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004:14) however pointed out that:

During this period, English shall be taught as a subject and that from
the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of
instruction and the language of immediate environment and French
shall be taught as subjects.

Despite the importance of English Language at the primary level of education in Nigeria in the areas of means of instructional delivery and for the fact that it is a compulsory subject required of every pupil to pass, there is still fears in the minds of the educational experts, scholars, parents and members of the society that primary school pupils tend to perform poorly. This is based on the recent observation of the falling standards of education in Nigeria, which has been attributed to the poor foundation of education being laid at the primary school level of education. Also, experience has shown that in recent time, primary school leavers cannot write simple letter or composition. This problem has been observed in both public and private primary schools in Rivers State.

However, there seems to be no current empirical evidence to show the performance level of primary school pupils in English Language among public and private schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. This lack of empirical evidence necessitated the undertaking of the present study of investigating the performance level of primary school pupils in written English among public and private schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. This study is carried out so as to fill research-based knowledge gap that exists in this area. Against this background, it is therefore necessary to investigate the performance level of primary school pupils in written English among public and private schools in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Recently, there has been serious outcry about the poor academic performance of primary school pupils particularly in written English. This problem has been seriously noted in both government

and privately owned primary schools in Rivers State despite the effort of the government to encourage every citizen to study English Language.

The need to have a single language as a means of communication in Nigeria as a country in order to cement the relationship existing between different people from different tribes with different cultural background has always instigated the government to promote and vigorously campaign for the idea of every Nigerian citizen mastering one of the major three languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This can be seen in the National Policy on Education as the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004:9) stated that:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Despite the importance attached to English Language as the official language of communication in Nigeria and given that it is a compulsory subject in our school system at all levels, performance level of primary school pupils seems to drastically drop on a daily basis as many of them cannot write good letters, composition or do better in comprehension. This has become so worrisome among members of the academic environment and the society. Even, people seem to feel that it is worse in the private primary schools while others felt that performance level of English Language of the primary school pupils is better in the public schools than the private schools. This disagreement has caused some scholars to see the need to carry out empirical study such as this to document the true fact.

However, there seems to be no current empirical evidence to show that the performance level of primary school pupils in English Language in both public and private primary schools in Rivers State particularly in Port Harcourt metropolis. Therefore, based on this premise, there is a research-based knowledge gap existing about how well the primary school pupils in both public and private primary schools performing in English Language. This study of the performance level of primary school pupils in English Language is undertaken to fill the research-based knowledge gap that exists in this area.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the performance level of primary school pupils in English Language in both public and private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Specifically, the study attempted to achieve the following.

1. Identify the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in public primary schools.
2. Identify the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in private primary schools.
3. Compare the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in public and private primary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in public primary schools?
2. What is the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in private primary schools?
3. What is the difference in the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in public and private primary schools?

Hypotheses

The study was guided by a single formulated null hypothesis tested at 5% level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the performance level of primary school pupils in written English of pupils in public and private primary schools.

METHOD

This study employed comparative research design. The study adopted comparative research design approach because it provided descriptive overview of the data to compare the academic performance of pupils in English Language in public and private primary schools as well as to compare the academic performance of pupils based on sex in the public and private the primary schools.

The target population for this study consisted of three thousand, and twenty one (3,021) subjects (that is, 1,490 male and 1,531 female pupils) from primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The breakdown of the population for this study consists of 1,538 (that is, 712 male and 826 female) pupils from public primary schools and 1,483 (that is, 778 male and 705 female) pupils from private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis.

The sample size for this study consists of nine hundred and seven (907) subjects, which is a representative of 30% of the target population. The breakdown of the sample size used for this study is 462 (that is, 214 male and 248 female) pupils from public primary schools and 445 (that is, 233 male and 212 female) pupils from private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. Simple random sampling procedure was employed to arrive at the sample size.

The major instrument used in gathering data for the study was the teacher- made test, the teacher made test is the record of result scores from the primary school pupils' cumulative Record Folder. The measure of pupils' academic performance in English Language was obtained from the record of result scores in their cumulative record folders at the Public and Private Primary Schools in Port Harcourt. This approach is consistent with the method used by some researchers, for example, Panda & Panda (1977), as started in the reviewed literature. These researchers used the students' school final examination grades as a measure of students' academic performance.

It is noteworthy that the instrument used in gathering data for this study is a standardized test, which was the pupils' cumulative Result Scores. The pupils' cumulative results have its face and content validity for it has already been approved by the Examination Committees of the Primary Schools studied.

On validation of the instrument, the psychometric property such as validity coefficient had already been given, for it is a standardized test (Ubulom, Uzoeshi, Amini & Vipene, 2011; Ukwuije, 2003 and Joe (1995). The instrument had received face and content validity for it is of international standard. According to Aiken (1979), whenever an appreciable correlation between two inventories is found, the possibility of a common response set must be considered.

For Weighing or grading the Pupils' Examination Result Scores, the five-point rated format as presented below was used:

High score:	A	=	70	-	100	=	5	points
	B	=	60	-	69	=	4	points
Average Score	C	=	50	-	59	=	3	points
	D	=	45	-	49	=	2	points
Low scores	E	=	40	-	44	=	1	point
	F	=	0	-	39	=	0	point

The test score of each pupil was obtained from the Examination Record Folder of the Primary School and the Cumulative Grade point Average (CGPA) was used for this research study based on the above rated format.

In order to determine the range of test scores for high academic achievement, the mean score of the five point scale was chosen to be 3. The mean score corresponds with the score range of 50 - 59. The minimum score for the test scores of the pupils' results is 0 while the maximum score is 100. All scores above 3 and below 5 points represent high academic achievement or performance, while those between 0 and 2.99 represent low academic achievement or performance.

The data collected from the pupils' grades in English Language of the various public and private primary schools were analysed. The mean and standard deviation scores were extracted and

presented in appropriate tables to answer the three (3) research questions. To determine the extent of significant difference that existed between the independent and dependent variables at 0.05 alpha levels, the researchers employed t-test to analyse the data and test the validity of the single hypothesis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What is the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public primary schools?

Table 1: Computed Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of the performance level of primary school pupils in written English in public primary schools based on their Gender
(N = 462)

Variable	N	Total Score	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Remarks
Male	214	477.22	2.23	0.235	Low Level
Female	248	580.32	2.34	0.236	Low Level

Table 1 shows that the mean and standard deviation scores of the male and female pupils' academic performance level in written English in public primary schools are 2.23 (0.235) and 2.34 (0.236) respectively, which are less than the average point of 2.5. This implies that academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is low.

Research Question 2

What is the academic performance level of pupils in written English in private primary schools?

Table 2: Computed Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of the academic performance level of pupils in written English in private primary schools based on their Gender
(N = 445)

Variable	N	Total Score	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Remarks
Male	233	934.33	4.01	0.412	High Level
Female	212	983.68	4.64	0.423	High Level

Table 2 shows that the mean and standard deviation scores of the male and female pupils' academic performance level in written English in private primary schools are 4.01 (0.412) and 4.64 (0.423) respectively, which are higher than the average point of 2.5. This implies that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in in written English in private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is high.

Research Question 3

What is the difference in the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools?

Table 3: Computed Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of the difference in the Academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools?

(N = 907)

Variable	N	Total Score	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Remarks
Public Schools	447	1023.63	2.29	0.236	Low Level
Private Schools	460	1991.18	4.33	0.418	High Level

Table 3 shows that the mean and standard deviation scores of the male and female pupils' academic performance level in written English in public primary schools is 2.29 (0.236), which is less than the average point of 2.5. This implies that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is low. The table further shows that the mean and standard deviation scores of the male and female pupils' academic performance level in written English in private primary schools is 4.33 (0.418), which is greater than the average point of 2.5. This implies that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is high.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools.

Table 4: t-test Computation of the significant difference in the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools

Variable	N	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Df	t-Cal	t-Crit
Public Schools	447	2.29	0.236	905	2.534*	<u>+1.9610</u>
Private Schools	460	4.33	0.418			

N = 907

df = 905

P < 0.05

* = Significant

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in Port Harcourt metropolis. With N = 907 and df = 905, the calculated value of t-ratio is 2.534, which is less than the table value of 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level. At this juncture, the calculated t-ratio is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance since it is greater than the given critical value of t-ratio. The hypothesis (H_{01}) is thus rejected in favour of the fact that significant difference exists in the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools. Therefore, these researchers concluded that there is significant difference in the academic performance level of pupils in written English in public and private primary schools.

DISCUSSION

It was discovered in this study that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is low. The result of this study is contrary to the findings of Lubienski (2001) and Lubienski (2005) who discovered that female students perform better than their male counter in English Language in public schools. In this study, it was discovered that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is high. The result of this study supports the findings of Douglas (2000) and Douglas (2002) who discovered that the

academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in private primary schools is high.

It was discovered in the study that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools is low while that of male and female pupils in private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is high. It was also found out that significant difference exists in the academic performance level in written English of pupils in public and private primary schools. The result of this study is contrary to the findings of Lubienski (2001) and Lubienski (2005) and supports the findings of Douglas (2000) and Douglas (2002) who discovered that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools is low while that of male and female pupils in private primary schools is high.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and findings of this research, the researchers therefore noted that the academic performance level of male and female pupils in written English in public primary schools is low while that of the private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis is high. Based on the results of this study, the researchers therefore conclude that male and female primary school pupils in written English in private primary schools perform academically better in written English than male and female pupils in private primary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis

Recommendations

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

1. Government should ensure that English teachers in public secondary schools are retrained to enable them do well in teaching English Language.
2. The State's Universal Basic Education Board as well as the State Ministry of Education should endeavour assist the primary school teachers by ensuring that seminars, conferences are organised for English teachers. This will help to improve in their teaching effectiveness.
3. Government should recruit more English teachers so as to strengthened their efficiency
4. The State's Universal Basic Education Board as well as the State Ministry of Education should ensure adequate supervision for effective teaching.
5. Primary school pupils should be encouraged to concentrate in studying the use of English Language. This will help to improve on their written English

REFERENCES

- Aiken, L. R. (1979). *Psychological testing and assessment*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Anastasi A. (1982). *Psychological testing*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.
- Banjo, A. (1989). The status and roles of English as a second language. *New Educational Forum*. 7(2), 23-28.
- Burket, G. R. (1973). Empirical criteria for distinguishing and validating aptitude and achievement measures. In D. R. Green (ed.), *The aptitude-achievement distinction*. Montorey, Calif: CTB/McGraw-Hill.
- Carroll, J. B. (1973). The aptitude and achievement distinction: The case of foreign language aptitude proficiency. In D. R. Green (ed.), *The aptitude-achievement distinction*. Montorey, Calif: CTB/McGraw-Hill.
- Chubb, J. E., & Moe, T. M. (1990). *Politics, markets, and America's schools*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

- Coleman, J. S. (1997). The design of schools as output-driven organizations. In R. Shapira & P. W. Cookson (eds.), *Autonomy and choice in context: An international perspective* (249-270). Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Cooper, H. M., & Burgar, J. M. (1980). A study on students' achievement and ability. *American Educational Research Journal*. 17(1), 66-72.
- Douglas, J. O. (2000). English language as Nigerian official language. *Nigerian Journal of Education*. 12(2), 42-48.
- Douglas, J. O. (2002). An appraisal of the position of functional language education in the quest for sustainable development. *Eastern COEASU Journal of Teacher Education*. 1(1), 61-65.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004). *National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC.
- Friedman, M. (1955). The role of government in education. In R. A. Solo (Ed.), *Economics and the public interest* (pp. 127-134). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Friedman, M. (1962). *Capitalism and freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Iroegbu, O. N. (1992). The impact of family background factors on academic achievement: A review of findings. *Journal of Technical Teacher Education*. 19(1), 13-18.
- Iwundu, C. O. (1995). *Psychology for the education and health professions*. Port Harcourt: Capic Publishers Nigeria Limited.
- Joe, A. I. (1995). *Basic concepts of educational measurement and evaluation*. Port Harcourt: Paragraphics/Jeson Services.
- Kumar, C. N. (2012). *Mastery of English language*. London: McGraw-Hill
- Lubienski, C. (2001). Redefining "public" education: charter schools, common schools, and the rhetoric of reform. *Teachers College Record*, 103(4), 634-666.
- Lubienski, C. (2003b). Innovation in education markets: Theory and evidence on the impact of competition and choice in charter schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(2), 395-443.
- Lubienski, C. (2003c). Instrumentalist perspectives on the "public" in public education: Incentives and purposes. *Educational Policy*, 17(4), 478-502.
- Lubienski, C. (2005). Public schools in marketized environments: shifting incentives and unintended consequences of competition-based educational reforms. *American Journal of Education*, 111(4), 464-486.
- Sundaran, G. F. (2012). *Communication skills in English language*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Page, G. T., & Thomas, J. B. (1977). *International dictionary of education*. London: Kegan Page.
- Panda, K. C., & Panda, P. K. (1977). Self-concept, study behavior and cognitive performance of 6th grade boys in relation to their feelings of intellectual achievement responsibility. *Indian Journal of Behaviour*. 1(2), 1- 11.
- Tiffen, B. (1968). *A language in common*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Ubulom, W. J., Uzoeshi, K. C., Amini, C. M. & Vipene, J. B. (2011). *Fundamentals of measurement and evaluation*. Port Harcourt: Celwil Publishers Limited.
- Ukwuije, R. P. I. (2003). *Educational measurement and evaluation for teachers*. Port Harcourt: Celwil Publishers Limited.
- Witting, A. F., & Belkin, G. S. (1990). *Introduction to psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.