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**THE EFFECTS OF USING HAUSA LANGUAGE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KEBBI STATE, NIGERIA**

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This paper investigates the effects of using the Hausa language as a pedagogical tool for teaching English as a Second Language in primary schools within the Kebbi State context. English language teachers in the state often aim for an English-only classroom but face a significant communication barrier, as pupils, who are predominantly native Hausa speakers, struggle to comprehend English instructions. The study employed a mixed-methods design, with a sample of 30 participants (teachers and pupils) selected through random sampling from primary schools in the Birnin Kebbi educational zone. Data was elicited using questionnaire surveys and classroom-based assessments. The findings indicate that using Hausa as a facilitating tool in English classes has a dual effect—both positive and negative—on the teaching and learning process. The study concludes by recommending a strategic, limited use of Hausa and calls for further research into specific scaffolding techniques suitable for the Kebbi State context.

Introduction

The debate over using a student's first language (L1) in second language (L2) acquisition has persisted for decades. This issue is particularly salient in Nigeria's plurilingual landscape, where the National Policy on Education mandates the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate community as the medium of instruction in the early primary years. In Kebbi State, where Hausa is the dominant lingua franca, pupils encounter English as a second and official language from their first day of school.

Scholars like Nation (2003) and Schweers (1999) posit that the judicious use of the mother tongue in the L2 classroom can be highly beneficial. The central challenge for the teacher is to employ the L1 appropriately to aid comprehension without fostering an over-reliance on translation, which can inhibit the development of L2 proficiency (Atkinson, 1987).

English holds a position of immense importance in Nigeria, serving as the language of government, commerce, and higher education. Proficiency in English is widely seen as a gateway to socioeconomic mobility. However, in states like Kebbi, the linguistic distance between Hausa and English, coupled with limited exposure to English outside the classroom, presents a unique pedagogical challenge. This study, therefore, examines the effects of leveraging Hausa (L1) to teach English (L2) in the primary schools of Kebbi State.

Statement of the Problem

In Kebbi State, primary school teachers of English find it challenging to rely exclusively on the English language during lessons. This is primarily due to the low comprehension levels among pupils, who are native Hausa speakers with limited prior exposure to English (Usman, 2010). These teachers report significant difficulties in explaining grammatical rules, vocabulary, and instructional tasks without resorting to Hausa for clarification. Consequently, pupils often fail to

grasp core concepts when teaching is conducted solely in English. This study therefore aims to investigate the specific effects—both facilitative and inhibitive—of using the Hausa language in the teaching of English at the primary school level in Kebbi State.

Literature Review

The role of the student's first language (L1) in the acquisition of a second language (L2) remains a central and enduring debate in language pedagogy. This discourse is particularly critical in multilingual post-colonial contexts like Nigeria, where the official language, English, is also the primary medium of instruction, often sitting in complex diglossia with powerful indigenous languages like Hausa. This review synthesizes the prevailing arguments against and in support of L1 use, before focusing on the emergent, pragmatic perspective of its strategic application, which is most relevant to the ESL context of Kebbi State.

The Monolingual Paradigm and the Case for L2 Exclusion

Historically, dominant teaching methodologies like the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Approach advocated for a strict "monolingual principle," positing that L2 acquisition should mirror L1 acquisition through maximal exposure and minimal L1 interference (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In this view, the L1 is seen as a source of negative transfer, leading to errors and fossilisation. Proponents of this perspective, such as Rababah (2003), argue that an immersive target-language environment is essential for developing fluency and intuitive grammatical competence. They contend that any use of L1 creates a "crutch," preventing students from developing the necessary cognitive strategies to think and operate directly in the L2. In the context of Kebbi State, this philosophy would translate to an English-only policy from the earliest grades, aiming to accelerate proficiency through total immersion.

The Affective and Cognitive Rationale for L1 Integration

In contrast to the monolingual paradigm, a significant body of research underscores the pedagogical value of the L1. Scholars like Schweers (1999) and Brown (2000) highlight the *affective* benefits, arguing that the judicious use of a learner's mother tongue, such as Hausa, can reduce anxiety, build a sense of security, and validate their existing knowledge and identity. This is crucial in primary education, where emotional safety directly impacts cognitive engagement.

Beyond affect, the *cognitive* advantages are substantial. The work of Hamers and Blanc (2000) on bilingualism demonstrates that a strong foundation in the L1 facilitates the learning of an L2, as linguistic and cognitive skills are interdependent and transferable across languages. This aligns with Cummins' (1981) seminal theory of a Common Underlying Proficiency. Furthermore, scholars like Nation (2003) and Swain and Lapkin (2000) posit that the L1 is a powerful cognitive tool. They argue that using the L1 for complex metalinguistic tasks—such as explaining grammar rules, clarifying ambiguous vocabulary, or negotiating the meaning of a difficult text—can streamline learning and deepen understanding without impeding L2 development.

Towards a Pragmatic Middle Ground: Strategic and Purposeful L1 Use

The contemporary consensus in language pedagogy is moving away from the absolutism of the past towards a more pragmatic, middle-ground approach. This perspective does not advocate for the random or extensive use of the L1 but rather for its strategic and purposeful application (Atkinson, 1987). The key is not *whether* to use the L1, but *when*, *how much*, and *for what purpose*.

As Deller and Rinvulcri (2002) caution, the overuse of L1 can indeed become a barrier to L2 acquisition, creating a dependency on translation. However, they and others acknowledge that a

complete prohibition is both impractical and counterproductive. The focus, therefore, shifts to identifying the specific, appropriate moments where L1 use can act as a scaffold. These moments may include giving complex instructions, explaining abstract concepts, conducting quick comprehension checks, and fostering peer support (Cameron, 2001; Miles, 2004). In the specific sociolinguistic context of Kebbi State, where Hausa is the bedrock of daily communication, ignoring this powerful cognitive and affective resource is a missed pedagogical opportunity.

The Nigerian and Hausa-Specific Context

Within Nigeria, the debate is framed by the National Policy on Education, which advocates for mother-tongue instruction in the early years. Research in Northern Nigeria, including studies by scholars like Usman (2010), has documented the reality of code-switching between Hausa and English in classrooms. Teachers intuitively use Hausa to bridge comprehension gaps, manage classrooms, and explain difficult concepts, suggesting a grassroots recognition of its utility. The challenge, as identified in the literature, is to move this practice from an ad-hoc strategy to a principled pedagogical technique that systematically supports the ultimate goal of English proficiency without undermining the value of the indigenous language.

This review establishes that the strategic use of Hausa is not a sign of pedagogical failure but a potential asset. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to this discourse by investigating the specific effects and optimal strategies of using Hausa in the ESL classrooms of Kebbi State, providing localised insights for teachers and policymakers.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

Q1. What is the effects of using the Hausa language on the teaching and learning of English as a second language in primary schools in Kebbi State?

Q2. Under what specific classroom circumstances is the use of Hausa considered most effective by teachers?

Q3. What strategies can teachers employ to optimise the use of Hausa for improving pupils' skills in English?

Research Objectives

This research intends to:

- i. Identify and analyse the effects (positive and negative) of using Hausa in the teaching of English in Kebbi State's primary schools.
- ii. Examine the classroom contexts (e.g., grammar instruction, vocabulary explanation, classroom management) where teachers find the use of Hausa most necessary.
- iii. Propose practical pedagogical strategies for using Hausa to effectively improve pupils' English language skills.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, utilising both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The sample consisted of 30 participants, comprising 15 English teachers and 15 Primary 5 pupils, selected randomly from public primary schools in the Birnin Kebbi metropolis. The researcher employed a semi-structured questionnaire for teachers to gather data on their attitudes and frequency of Hausa use. Additionally, a simple proficiency test was administered to pupils to assess their understanding of concepts taught with and without Hausa

support. Interviews were also conducted with a subset of teachers to gain deeper insights into their pedagogical choices.

Quantitative Data Presentation

Table 1: Frequency of Hausa (L1) Use in Various Classroom Contexts

(Teachers responded on a scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always)

Classroom Context for L1 Use	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	% Reporting "Often" or "Always"
1. Explaining Complex Grammar Rules	4.73	0.46	100%
2. Defining/Translating New Vocabulary	4.20	0.77	87%
3. Giving Activity Instructions	3.93	0.88	73%
4. Classroom Management & Discipline	4.60	0.63	93%
5. Checking for Overall Comprehension	4.33	0.72	80%

The Effects of Using Haus..	Musa, S. & Mukhtar, M.		JOES 2025 1(2)
Classroom Context for L1 Use	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	% Reporting "Often" or "Always"
6. Encouraging/Praising Students	3.40	1.12	47%

Interpretation: Data confirms a high dependence on Hausa, especially for metalinguistic explanations (grammar) and classroom logistics. Its use is slightly less frequent for affective purposes like praise.

Table 2: Teacher Perceptions of Effects of Strategic Hausa Use

(Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)

Statement	Mean	SD	% Agree/Strongly Agree
Using Hausa improves pupils' comprehension of lessons.	4.87	0.35	100%
Using Hausa reduces pupils' anxiety and increases participation.	4.67	0.49	100%
Overuse of Hausa can reduce pupils' exposure to English.	4.27	0.80	87%
It is possible to use Hausa as a scaffold without hindering English proficiency.	4.13	0.83	80%
I feel competent in deciding <i>when</i> to switch to Hausa.	3.60	1.12	60%

Interpretation: Teachers strongly acknowledge the dual effect: overwhelming agreement on the benefits for comprehension and affect, but also clear awareness of the risk of overuse. The lower mean on teacher competence suggests a need for targeted training.

Section 2: Pupil Assessment Data (N=15)

Table 3: Pupil Performance on Classroom-Based**Assessments**

(Scores are percentages on a 20-point test covering taught concepts)

Pupil ID	Test A: Concepts taught with English-only method	Test B: Concepts taught with Strategic Hausa support	Difference (B - A)
P01	45%	75%	+30%
P02	50%	85%	+35%
P03	30%	65%	+35%
P04	60%	80%	+20%
P05	35%	70%	+35%
P06	40%	60%	+20%
P07	55%	90%	+35%
P08	25%	50%	+25%
P09	65%	85%	+20%
P10	70%	95%	+25%
P11	20%	55%	+35%

Pupil ID	Test A: Concepts taught		Test B: Concepts taught		Difference (B - A)
	with	English-only	with	Strategic Hausa support	
	method				
P12	45%		75%		+30%
P13	50%		80%		+30%
P14	30%		65%		+35%
P15	40%		70%		+30%
MEAN					
SCORE	44.0%		73.0%		+29.0%

Qualitative Data from Teacher Interviews (Illustrative Quotes)

Thematic analysis of teacher interviews (n=8) reinforced and contextualized the quantitative data.

Key themes and verbatim quotes include:

Theme 1: Hausa as an Indispensable Scaffold for Metalinguistic Understanding

- *"If I say 'preposition' in English, they stare. But if I say 'preposition shine kalmomi da ke nuna wuri, lokaci, ko hali... kamar a cikin, a kan, zuwa...' (a preposition shows place, time, or manner... like in, on, to), their faces light up. The concept unlocks."* – Teacher 3 (Male, 10 years experience)

- *"For tenses, Hausa is our saviour. The difference between 'He goes' and 'He went' is abstract until I link it to 'yana tafiya' and 'ya tafi'. Then the pattern makes sense."* – Teacher 7 (Female, 5 years experience)

Theme 2: The Persistent Challenge of Over-reliance and "Code-Switching Creep"

- *"The problem is stopping. You explain one word in Hausa, then a pupil asks about the next word in the same sentence in Hausa. Before you know it, the entire lesson is a translation exercise."* – Teacher 1 (Male, 15 years experience)
- *"We use it for everything—'Ku fita!*' (Go out!), 'Ku zo!' (Come!). It's faster for management, but then they don't learn the simple English commands."** – Teacher 5 (Female, 8 years experience)

Theme 3: Contexts for Most Effective Use

Teachers consistently identified three high-value contexts:

1. **Initial Concept Introduction:** "For the first time explaining something completely new, like 'adjective' or 'paragraph.'"
2. **Crisis Clarification:** "When you see universal confusion after an English explanation. A quick Hausa check saves the lesson."
3. **Complex Task Instructions:** "For multi-step activities like 'write a letter, then exchange with a partner, and peer-edit.' If they don't understand the task, they can't do it in any language."

Analysis of the data revealed a high dependence on Hausa among English teachers in Kebbi State.

Key findings include:

1. **Grammar Instruction:** Teachers unanimously agreed that explaining complex grammatical structures (e.g., tenses, prepositions) in Hausa led to significantly better pupil comprehension.
2. **Vocabulary Building:** For introducing new vocabulary, teachers often used direct translation or code-switching. However, they acknowledged that overuse stifled the development of English-thinking skills.
3. **Pupil Proficiency:** The pupil assessments showed that classes where Hausa was used strategically for clarification performed better in comprehension tasks than those in a strict English-only environment.
4. **Challenge of Overuse:** A primary challenge identified was the tendency to overuse Hausa for classroom management and simple instructions, thereby reducing pupils' exposure to comprehensible English input.

The main problem cited by teachers was the presence of a large number of pupils with very weak English foundations, which compels the use of Hausa to ensure basic participation and comprehension.

Proposed Solutions and Best Methods:

Based on the findings, the following strategies are proposed to harness the benefits of Hausa while mitigating its drawbacks:

First, instructional planning should be intentional and diagnostic. Teachers are advised to set specific, competency-based goals for each lesson and conduct initial diagnostic assessments to gauge students' prior knowledge. This approach allows for differentiated instruction, where teaching methods and the strategic use of Hausa can be tailored to the varied capabilities, motivations, and learning styles within a single classroom. Cultivating a positive and supportive classroom environment is the foundational step in this process, encouraging students to take risks in the target language.

Second, collaborative and student-centered activities should be prioritized to maximize English production. Techniques such as pair work, group projects, and peer-teaching can reduce the affective filter, making students feel more at ease when communicating. This shifts the classroom dynamic from teacher-dominated discourse to one rich in student activity, fostering learner autonomy and allowing students to develop their own interlanguage. Within these activities, error correction should be handled sensitively, employing techniques like wait-time and prompting for self-correction to build confidence rather than inhibit participation.

Third, a multi-faceted approach to language skills development is essential. To enrich vocabulary, teachers should gradually introduce the use of monolingual (English-English) dictionaries alongside bilingual ones, dedicating short, focused sessions to vocabulary building. Listening skills can be significantly improved through regular exposure to authentic audio resources, such as educational cassettes, simple English songs, and stories, which aid in accent acquisition and comprehension. To address the particularly challenging skill of writing, a progressive strategy is recommended. Students can begin by describing simple daily actions, using drawings as prompts to create simple sentences. When students cannot recall a word, they should be encouraged to write

it in Hausa initially and then look it up in a dictionary afterward, thus maintaining the flow of writing while emphasizing eventual accuracy.

Finally, the integration of technology and a clear communicative purpose are vital for engagement and motivation. Where available, digital tools such as language learning apps, educational videos, and data projectors can make lessons more engaging and relatable to students. Crucially, both teachers and students must be consistently reminded that the ultimate goal of the English class extends beyond passing examinations. Teachers should explicitly discuss the practical importance of English for accessing a wider world of opportunities and foster an awareness of the cultural differences embedded in the language. By framing English as a tool for global communication rather than a mere academic subject, students' intrinsic motivation can be significantly enhanced.

Conclusion

The teaching of English in the Hausa-dominant context of Kebbi State requires a pragmatic and balanced approach. The complete exclusion of Hausa from the English classroom is an impractical strategy that can lead to pupil alienation and failure. Conversely, the unregulated use of Hausa can undermine the very goal of achieving English proficiency. This study concludes that the strategic, purposeful, and limited use of Hausa as a scaffold is a necessary and effective pedagogical tool. The key for educators in Kebbi State is not to avoid Hausa, but to learn how to use it judiciously to bridge the gap to English, ultimately fostering a more supportive and effective learning environment. Further research is recommended to develop a structured framework for L1 use in ESL contexts across Northwestern Nigeria.

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