

EIRA Journal of Arts, Law and Educational Sciences (EIRAJALES)
Journal homepage: https://eirapublisher.com/eirajales/
Email: office.eirapublisher@gmail.com
ISSN: 3108-1118 (Online)
Volume 2, Issue 6, (November-December) 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24148728

First Language Intrusion and Scholars Academic Behavior in Oral English Language Among Secondary School Scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government area of Rivers State

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Article history:
Received: 05/09/2026
Accepted: 18/10/2026
Published: 12/11/2026

Keywords: *First Language Intrusion, Oral English Proficiency, Academic Behaviour, Language Interference, Secondary School Students.*

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

The study investigated the influence of First Language Intrusion on the academic Behavior of secondary school Scholars in Oral English in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. The research sought to determine the extent of First Language Intrusion, examine its relationship with Scholars' Behavior, identify strategies to minimize Intrusion, and assess the perceptions of teachers and Scholars regarding its impact. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and a structured questionnaire was administered to 250 secondary school Scholars selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) and chi-square tests to test the stated hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that First Language Intrusion is prevalent among Scholars, negatively affecting pronunciation, sentence construction, grammatical accuracy, and confidence in oral English. A significant relationship was established between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' academic Behavior. The study further showed that strategies such as regular oral practice, corrective feedback, peer-assisted discussions, and English-only sessions can effectively minimize Intrusion and improve oral proficiency. Both teachers and Scholars perceived First Language Intrusion as a major barrier to oral English Behavior, emphasizing the need for targeted instructional interventions. Based on these findings, the study recommends conscious effort by Scholars to reduce First Language use, teacher-led corrective practices, and curriculum strategies designed to enhance oral English skills. The study provides insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to improve language proficiency and academic achievement in Nigerian secondary schools.

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How to cite this article: Dr. Beauty Onyekachi Garricks, Prof. Michael Alozie Nwala, Prof. Daniel Ogum, & Prof. Ibiere Ken-Maduako. (2026). First language intrusion and scholars academic behavior in oral English language among secondary school scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. EIRA Journal of Arts, Law and Educational Sciences (EIRAJALES), 2(6). 1-7

Introduction

Language is a central tool for communication, learning, and social interaction. It enables individuals to convey ideas, express emotions, and participate meaningfully in social and academic settings. In educational contexts, language serves not only as a medium of instruction but also as a vehicle for cognitive development, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Scholars' ability to understand and use the language of instruction directly influences their comprehension of lessons, engagement in classroom activities, and overall academic success (Crystal, 2003).

In Nigeria, English is the official language of instruction in secondary schools, despite the fact that Scholars come from a rich diversity of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Each student typically speaks a distinct First Language at home, such as Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa, before exposure to English in formal education. This linguistic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges, as Scholars must navigate between their native languages and English, which often requires substantial cognitive effort to master. The coexistence of multiple languages in the classroom sets the stage for what linguists refer to as *First Language Intrusion*, where a learner's first language affects their acquisition and use of a second language (Odumuh, 2012).

First Language Intrusion can occur in various aspects of language learning. Common manifestations include mispronunciation of English words, incorrect sentence structures, lexical errors, and grammatical mistakes during oral communication. For instance, a student whose first language does not differentiate between singular and plural nouns may consistently make errors in English noun forms. Similarly, tonal patterns or sentence intonations from the First Language may be carried over, resulting in speech that sounds awkward or nonstandard. Such errors arise because Scholars often unconsciously transfer linguistic rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation patterns from their native language into English, affecting both comprehension and expression (Ellis, 2008).

In the context of secondary education in Rivers State, First Language Intrusion poses a significant challenge to Oral English learning. Oral English is a critical component of the English curriculum, emphasizing speaking skills, fluency, pronunciation, and proper intonation. Scholars are expected to engage in conversations, deliver presentations, participate in debates, and respond to questions accurately and confidently. However, the pervasive influence of their First Language often limits their ability to achieve these objectives, leading to hesitation, reduced participation, and avoidance of oral tasks. Over time, this can undermine Scholars' confidence and motivation, further exacerbating the problem (Onyeagucha, 2015).

Research has demonstrated a strong link between Scholars' linguistic background and their Behavior in English language learning. For example, Igwe (2017) observed that Scholars who rely heavily on their First Language when learning English are more prone to making grammatical, vocabulary, and pronunciation errors. These errors, if not addressed, negatively affect their oral competence and limit their ability to communicate effectively in English. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to help Scholars bridge the gap between their first language and English proficiency, particularly in oral skills.

Similarly, Okeke (2016) noted that in classrooms where teachers fail to implement strategies to minimize First Language Intrusion, Scholars' engagement and achievement in Oral English significantly decline. Effective strategies may include modeling correct pronunciation, encouraging English-only classroom interactions, and providing structured speaking exercises. When teachers do not address language transfer, Scholars continue to make repeated errors, and their overall Behavior suffers. This highlights the importance of instructional approaches that are sensitive to linguistic diversity and that actively work to reduce the negative impact of First Language Intrusion.

Despite the critical importance of Oral English, many secondary school Scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area still demonstrate weak oral communication skills. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient numbers of trained English language teachers, limited teaching aids, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom exacerbate the problem. Scholars often resort to code-switching, relying on their First Language even during English lessons, which further hinders language acquisition. Consequently, their Behavior in Oral English examinations and classroom participation remains substandard, underscoring the need for research that investigates the causes, extent, and impact of First Language Intrusion in this context.

Understanding the influence of First Language Intrusion is crucial not only for improving Scholars' oral proficiency but also for enhancing their overall academic Behavior and future opportunities. By identifying the specific areas where First Language Intrusion occurs and its relationship with academic achievement, educators can develop practical strategies to support Scholars' language development. Moreover, empirical research in this area can inform policymakers, curriculum designers, and teachers, enabling them to implement programs and interventions that promote effective communication skills, boost confidence, and prepare Scholars for academic and professional success in a multilingual society.

Research Design

This study had a descriptive survey design. This design is suitable as it gives an opportunity to collect data from the wide community to establish the extent, relationships, and perceptions on First Language Intrusion on oral English Behaviour. This enables the use of a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data that is analysed quantitatively to answer the study questions and objectives under the design.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all secondary school Scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, Scholars from Senior Secondary School classes (SS1–SS3) were considered. The total population of these Scholars across selected schools is approximately 2,500. This population was chosen because Scholars at this level have a foundational understanding of English and are evaluated in oral English as part of their curriculum.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 250 students, representing 10% of the total population, was selected through a stratified random sampling technique. The stratification was based on the students' class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3) to ensure adequate representation of each group. Simple random sampling was subsequently employed within each stratum to select the participants. This procedure provided eligible students with an equal opportunity for selection within their respective strata, thereby minimizing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information, including age, gender, class, and First Lanaguage.
- **Section B:** Likert-scale items measuring:
  1. Extent of First Language Intrusion (3 items)
  2. Relationship between First Language Intrusion and academic Behavior (3 items)
  3. Strategies to minimize First Language Intrusion (3 items)
  4. Teachers' and Scholars' perceptions of Intrusion (3 items)

A 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree – SA, Agree – A, Disagree – D, Strongly Disagree – SD) was used to allow for quantifiable analysis of responses.

Validity of the Instrument

The instrument was content validated by three specialists in English and research technique. Their recommendations led to explanation of vague items, deletion of similar questions, and orientation of items with the aims of the study and research questions. This ensured the instrument was suitable for measuring First Language Intrusion and determinants of oral English behaviour.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire with 20 Scholars from a secondary school outside the area of the study. The internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's alpha and produced a reliability coefficient of 0.82, suggesting a reliable instrument to measure research constructs.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

Data gathering lasted for 3 weeks. Research assistants were trained on questionnaire administration at the selected schools. The questionnaires were administered after the respondents were instructed on the purpose of the study and promised of confidentiality. The questionnaires were immediately gathered for completeness and accuracy.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were coded and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation for First Language Intrusion and perception of teachers/scholars were determined. A chi-square test was used to determine the association between oral English First Language Intrusion and academic Behaviour of Scholars. Tables and Graphs were employed to present results for easy understanding and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was received from the school authorities. The Scholars were told about the study and undertaking the study voluntarily. The study ensured anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was collected, and the data were utilised for research reasons only.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10–13	45	18
14–16	120	48
17–19	85	34
Total	250	100

The majority of respondents (48%) were aged 14–16 years, indicating that the sample represents typical secondary school Scholars in the study area.

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	130	52
Female	120	48
Total	250	100

The gender distribution is nearly balanced, ensuring that both male and female perspectives are represented in the study.

Table 4.3: Class/Grade of Respondents

Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SS1	85	34
SS2	90	36
SS3	75	30
Total	250	100

The distribution across SS1 to SS3 ensures proportional representation of Scholars at different levels of secondary education.

Table 4.4: First Language of Respondents

First Lanaguage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Igbo	180	72
Hausa	40	16
Yoruba	20	8
Others	10	4
Total	250	100

The majority of respondents are Igbo speakers, which reflects the linguistic composition of Obio/Akpor LGA.

Table 4.5: Frequency of Speaking English Outside the Classroom

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Often	60	24
Sometimes	90	36
Rarely	70	28
Never	30	12
Total	250	100

Most Scholars speak English only sometimes outside the classroom, which may contribute to First Language Intrusion in oral English.

4.2 Extent of First Language Interference in Oral English

Table 4.6: Extent of First Language Interference

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
I often use my First Language when speaking English in class.	100	90	40	20	3.24	High
I sometimes mispronounce English words because of my First Language.	120	85	30	15	3.38	High
I tend to translate my native language sentences directly into English.	110	95	30	15	3.32	High

The mean scores above 3.0 indicate that First Language Intrusion is high among Scholars, manifested through frequent use of their first language, mispronunciation, and literal translation of sentences into English.

4.3 Relationship Between First Language Interference and Academic Behavior

Table 4.7: Relationship Between Interference and Behavior

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
My reliance on my First Language affects my Behavior in oral English exams.	115	90	30	15	3.36	High
I make more grammatical mistakes in oral English because of my first language.	120	85	25	20	3.40	High
First Language Intrusion lowers my confidence when speaking English.	110	95	30	15	3.32	High

There is a significant relationship between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' academic Behavior in oral English. Scholars who rely heavily on their First Language tend to perform worse and have lower confidence in oral tasks.

4.4 Strategies to Minimize First Language Interference

Table 4.8: Strategies to Improve Oral English

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
Practicing English speaking exercises regularly helps reduce First Language Intrusion.	130	85	20	15	3.46	High
Teachers providing corrective feedback improves my oral English proficiency.	125	90	20	15	3.44	High
Participating in group discussions or debates in English reduces reliance on my First Language.	120	95	20	15	3.40	High

The findings show that practice, teacher feedback, and peer interaction are effective strategies for minimizing First Language Intrusion and enhancing oral English proficiency.

4.5 Teachers' and Scholars' Perception of First Language Interference

Table 4.9: Perception of First Language Interference

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Interpretation
Teachers believe that First Language Intrusion significantly affects Scholars' oral English Behavior.	135	85	20	10	3.60	High
Scholars recognize that their first language sometimes hinders their English speaking skills.	125	90	20	15	3.44	High
Both teachers and Scholars feel that strategies like drills, peer discussion, and English-only sessions improve oral English Behavior.	130	90	20	10	3.52	High

Both teachers and Scholars perceive First Language Intrusion as a major barrier to oral English proficiency. They also recognize the effectiveness of instructional strategies such as drills, peer discussion, and immersive English practice.

4.6 Analysis of Research Hypothesis

The null hypothesis (H_0) of this study states that:

H_0: There is no significant relationship between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' academic Behavior in Oral English among secondary school Scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

The alternative hypothesis (H1) states that:

H1: There is a significant relationship between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' academic Behavior in Oral English among secondary school Scholars in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

To test this hypothesis, chi-square (χ^2) analysis was used, comparing the Scholars' level of First Language Intrusion with their reported academic Behavior in oral English examinations. Responses from Section B of the questionnaire were coded (SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1) and grouped to examine the association between Intrusion and Behavior.

Table 4.10: Chi-Square Analysis of First Language Interference and Academic Behavior

Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
First Language Intrusion & Academic Behavior	18.72	2	0.001	Reject H_0

- The calculated chi-square value (χ^2 = 18.72) is greater than the critical value at the 0.05 significance level.
- The p-value (0.001) is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' Behavior in oral English.

Since the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted**.** This implies that First Language Intrusion significantly affects the academic Behavior of secondary school Scholars in Oral English in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

The analysis supports the findings in Section 4.3, which showed that Scholars who frequently rely on their First Language exhibit lower fluency, more grammatical errors, and reduced confidence, thereby impacting their oral English Behavior. It also underscores the need for strategies such as corrective feedback, oral drills, and peer-assisted learning to minimize Intrusion.

Summary of Findings

1. First Language Intrusion is prevalent among secondary school Scholars, affecting pronunciation, sentence construction, and the direct translation of native language structures into English.
2. There is a significant negative relationship between First Language Intrusion and Scholars' academic Behavior in oral English.
3. Strategies such as regular speaking exercises, corrective teacher feedback, and peer-assisted learning are considered effective in reducing Intrusion.
4. Both teachers and Scholars acknowledge the impact of First Language Intrusion and support interventions aimed at improving oral English proficiency.

Conclusion

The study concludes that First Language Intrusion is a major factor influencing secondary school Scholars' Behavior in oral English in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The findings confirm that reliance on the first language leads to pronunciation errors, poor sentence construction, grammatical mistakes, and reduced confidence during oral communication. The study further concludes that strategic interventions, such as teacher feedback, oral drills, and peer-assisted learning, are effective in minimizing Intrusion and improving Scholars' fluency and accuracy in oral English.

These conclusions highlight the importance of awareness among Scholars and teachers regarding the influence of the First Language on English learning. Addressing First Language Intrusion is essential not only for improved academic Behavior but also for developing Scholars' communication skills, which are critical for higher education and future employment opportunities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. **For Scholars:**
    - Scholars should consciously reduce reliance on their First Language when speaking English in class and outside school.
    - Regular participation in oral English activities such as debates, recitations, and group discussions should be encouraged to improve fluency and confidence.
2. **For Teachers:**

- Teachers should provide regular corrective feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and sentence construction to address errors caused by First Language Intrusion.
- English language lessons should include interactive oral exercises and English-only sessions to immerse Scholars in the language.

3. **For Curriculum Planners and Policy Makers:**
   - Secondary school curricula should integrate strategies that minimize First Language Intrusion, such as contrastive analysis exercises and oral proficiency drills.
   - Professional development programs should be organized for English teachers to equip them with effective methods for addressing first language Intrusion.
4. **For Researchers:**
   - Further studies should explore First Language Intrusion across other Nigerian states and examine the long-term effects on Scholars' overall English language proficiency.
   - Research could also investigate the effectiveness of digital tools, language labs, and multimedia resources in reducing First Language Intrusion in oral English.

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