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THE ROLE OF PIDGIN ENGLISH AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN UNIFYING STUDENTS IN SOUTH EAST TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on the role of Pidgin English as a means of communication in unifying students in South East tertiary institutions, using five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East as focal points. The objectives cutting across; to find out the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students, ways in which it has helped as a means of communication and unified the students in the South East tertiary institutions. Survey research design was adopted for this study. Total sample size of (399) respondents were randomly selected out of (127,700) students from the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East (UNN-Enugu State, FUNAI-Eboyi State, IMSU-Imo State, NAU-Anambra State and ABSU-Abia State). Average of (80) respondents were randomly selected from different departments in each of the five (5) selected Universities in the South East. A questionnaire titled: Pidgin English and Unification of Students Survey Questionnaire (PEUSSQ), which was constructed for the respondents, containing 15 items and design on a 4-point Likert scale, was used for data collection in the study. The reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings showed that Pidgin English as a means of communication is relevance in unifying students through (a dynamic and widely spoken Pidgin English which has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in all tertiary institutions in the country; as a result, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institution), unifying the students in the South East tertiary institutions. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the ministry of education, curriculum planners and developers should regularly organize workshops/seminars to educate the lecturers, students and facilitators on the importance of Pidgin English to the students especially, in the department such as Mass communication.

Keywords: Pidgin English, Communication, *Unification*, Relevance, Tertiary institution, Curriculum planners and developers.

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Introduction

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), simply referred to as "Broken English" or "pidgin" is a dynamic and widely spoken language that has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in Nigeria and by extension all tertiary institutions in the country. NPE has evolved over centuries through interactions between various ethnic groups, indigenous languages, and European colonizers (Esiobu, 2020). Today, it is spoken and understood by millions of Nigerians across different regions and social strata, serving as a common language for communication in different contexts. Although NPE was traditionally seen as a language of informal communication, recently, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institutions. This has led to its increased use in entertainment, media, literature, everyday communication, as well as education (including secondary schools and tertiary institutions) (Dike, 2017).

Nigerian Pidgin English is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, history, and everyday life. Integrating NPE into the curriculum provides students with an opportunity to explore their cultural heritage, understand the nuances of Nigerian society, and engage with authentic texts and materials written in Pidgin (Edet, 2021). Incorporating culturally relevant content and examples helps educators make learning more meaningful and relatable to students. Another benefit of incorporating Nigerian Pidgin English into tertiary education is its ability to promote linguistic inclusivity and accommodate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Many students come from homes where NPE is the primary language of communication, and integrating it into the curriculum can help bridge the gap between home and school languages, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural identity (Haji & Artor, 2019).

Contrary to popular misconceptions, Nigerian Pidgin English is not a "broken" or inferior form of English but rather a unique and legitimate linguistic variety with its grammar, vocabulary, and rules of usage. This could have informed Daris (2014) to point out that exposing students to NPE in the classroom can help them develop a more in-depth understanding of language variation, language attitudes, and sociolinguistic norms. He therefore submits that studying Nigerian Pidgin English alongside Standard English, can enhance student's language skills and make them more proficient communicators in both formal and informal contexts. Nigerian Pidgin English is often used as a medium of communication among students, especially in informal settings such as break times and social interactions. Onyema (2016) on his part observes that introducing NPE into the classroom environment can facilitate better communication and engagement among students, particularly those who may struggle with English as a second language. For him, it is feasible by allowing students to express themselves in a language they are

comfortable with, lecturers can create a more inclusive and participatory learning environment.

Although, incorporating Nigerian Pidgin English into tertiary education has many advantages, it also possesses several other challenges and considerations that must be addressed. Effective implementation of Nigerian Pidgin English in higher institutions necessitates adequate training and support for educators (Bassey, 2019). Lecturers need opportunities for professional development, language proficiency assessments, and pedagogical training to be able to effectively incorporate NPE into their lecturing practices and create supportive learning environments for students. Nigerian Pidgin English is often stigmatized and marginalized in formal educational settings due to negative language attitudes and perceptions. Overcoming these biases requires advocacy, awareness-raising, and community engagement to promote the value and legitimacy of NPE as a language of instruction and communication. Developing standardized curricular materials and educational resources for teaching Nigerian Pidgin English in institutions requires careful planning, collaboration, and research. Educators require access to high-quality textbooks, instructional materials, and training programmes tailored to the specific linguistic and educational needs of students (Okere, 2012). According to Dickson (2018), with collaborative efforts, policy reforms, and investment in teacher training and curriculum development, Nigerian Pidgin English can play a transformative role in shaping the future of education and empowering students to thrive in a multilingual society.

The unifying roles of Pidgin English in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is the language of integration in Nigeria as our previous discussion shows. That is why Abama (2020) reminds us that amidst the compounding complexities of Nigeria especially in relation to the language question, the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness is Pidgin English. More often than not, according to him, activities conducted in indigenous languages are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays. This explains why even
the colonial era when English had not attained its present level of ascendance in national
and international affairs, political parties were formed in Pidgin English. This trend has necessarily survived until today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English. English is also acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance(Ogunleye,2018). It is the language that is not fraught with suspicions in any formal or literate context. It is the only language that does not generate suspicions of
having a skeleton in one's cupboard or a "hidden agenda in inter-ethnic relationships

or transactions(Edoh,2015).Pidgin English also serves as the language of nationalism, concerned with political integration and efficiency of students in tertiary institutions (Bamgbose, 2021). It is the language that brings all the supposed "nations" of Nigeria to function as one, each ethnic group being a nation on its own with the Hausa nation, the Ibo nation, the Yoruba nation, the Edo nation, Jukunland, Tivland, Urhoboland, Ogoniland, etc., as examples. But, the cohesion of all under the subsuming Nigerian nation is possible through Pidgin English (Edoh, 2015).

As a language of wider communication (LWC), Pidgin English is used for phobic communion, ceremonial purpose, an instrument of keeping records, information dissemination, self-experiment and embodiment of thought among the various linguistic groups in Nigeria (Achara, 2021). The common linguistic basis that constitutes a requisite for the existence of any nation is provided by Pidgin English. So with Pidgin English as the common tongue to all the ethnic groups, the collective sentiment of belonging together despite the individual or ethnic differences is forged. Related to the discussion is the fact that Nigerian Nationalism or collective identity is stamped on national institutions through the medium of Pidgin English (Haji & Artor, 2019). Communication is known to be as old as human society whereas the concept of nation is of fairly recent origin. According to Cleng (2010), Pidgin English facilitates social communication and helps nurture mutual cooperation, noting that, in a tertiary institution it is a product of intense social communication and cooperation. For him, it equates a tertiary institution with a linguistic community. He therefore asserts that, "You must understand that the phrase 'tertiary institution' means a linguistic unit, a linguistic community, depends always on intercourse, on a community of life."The development of any tertiary institution according to him, will come to a standstill without a medium of communication like Pidgin English in place. Wright (2012) also holds a similar view when he states that "a national community is inconceivable without a common language like Pidgin English." Charson (2013) has made it clear that without communication social structuring amongst human beings would become impossible. Thus, he states that "the richer their cooperation in producing tangible goods and services, in developing highly developed societies, and developing and sharing intangible treasures of knowledge, art, and values, the greater their need for rich, varied, quick and accurate communication."

Statement of the Problem

Presently, Pidgin English is spoken and understood by millions of Nigerians across different regions and social strata, serving as a common language for communication in different contexts. However, it was traditionally seen as a language of informal communication. Recently, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English. This has led to its increased use in entertainment, media, literature, everyday communication, as well as education (including higher institutions).Nigerian Pidgin English is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, history, and everyday life.

Unfortunately, NPE is not integrated into the curriculum provided for the students which offers them with an opportunity to explore their cultural heritage, understand the nuances of Nigerian society, and engage with authentic texts and materials written in Pidgin. NPE is not incorporated into the culturally relevant content and examples which helps the educators to make learning more meaningful and relatable to students. Again, as put by Almed (2009), neglecting to incorporate Nigerian Pidgin English into education has always setback linguistic inclusivity and accommodation of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Umeh (2013) observed that many students come from homes where NPE is the primary language of communication, and not integrating it into the curriculum can help increase the gap between home and school languages, as against a sense of belonging and cultural identity.

Contrary to popular misconceptions, Nigerian Pidgin English is not a "broken" or inferior form of English but rather a unique and legitimate linguistic variety with its grammar, vocabulary, and rules of usage. There is inability to expose students of Mass communication to NPE in the classroom which ordinarily could help them develop a better understanding of language variation, language attitudes, and sociolinguistic norms. Nigerian Pidgin English is often used as a medium of communication among students, especially in informal settings such as break times and social interactions. Introducing NPE into the classroom environment can facilitate better communication and engagement among students, particularly those who may struggle with English as a second language. By allowing students to express themselves in a language they are comfortable with, lecturers in Department of Mass Communication do not create a more inclusive and participatory learning environment, which will go a long way to assist the students to practices effectively in the communication industries after graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The broad objective of this study focused on the role of Pidgin English as a means of communication in unifying students in South East tertiary institutions. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.
2. To examine ways in which Pidgin English as a means of communication has helped to unify students in the South East tertiary institutions.
3. To ascertain whether or not Pidgin English as a means of communication has succeeded in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were posed for the study:

1. What is the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions?
2. In what ways has Pidgin English as a means of communication helped to unify students in the South East tertiary institutions?
3. How has Pidgin English as a means of communication succeeded in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

H_1: There is no relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

H_2: There is no significant relationship between Pidgin English as a means of communication and unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

H_3: Pidgin English as a means of communication has not unified the students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Research Method

The study adopted a survey research design. The targeted population for the study consisted of all the students in the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East, Nigeria. Total sample size of (399) respondents were randomly selected out of (127,700) students from the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East (UNN-Enugu State, FUNAI-Eboyi State, IMSU-Imo State, NAU-Anambra State and ABSU-Abia State). Average of (80) respondents were randomly selected from different departments in each of the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East. A questionnaire titled: Pidgin English and Unification of Students Survey Questionnaire (PEUSSQ), which was constructed for the respondents, containing 15 items and design on a 4-point Likert scale, was used for data collection in the study. The research instrument was validated by experts from various departments in the selected Universities, as well as Measurement and Evaluation experts. In order to ascertain the validity of the instrument for the study, the researcher ensured that the questionnaire covered the research questions of the study and was given to experts for scrutiny. This was trial

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tested and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. The data was collected and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision rule for interpretation of the results of the data analysis was that of a mean score of 2.5 and above, which was regarded as agreed/ accepted while, below 2.5 was disagreed/ rejected.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions?

Table 1: Mean Response on the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East Tertiary Institutions**.**

S/N	Items	Mean	Std	Decision
1.	I like speaking pidgin English in the school.	2.54	1.65	Agreed
2.	I feel free interacting with pidgin English while discussing with students from other cultural background.	2.62	1.68	Agreed
3.	Introducing NPE into the classroom environment can facilitate better communication and engagement among students.	2.78	1.24	Agreed
4.	Pidgin English also serves as the language of nationalism, concerned with students' political integration and efficiency	3.34	1.26	Agreed
5.	It is the language that brings all the supposed "students" of Nigeria to function as one.	2.98	1.57	Agreed
	Grand mean	**2.85**	**1.48**	

Table 1 showed that all the respondents in items agreed that there were relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East Tertiary Institutions while, non-disagreed with the items. Meanwhile, the grand mean and standard deviation are 2.85 and 1.48. This underscores the fact that the respondents believe that there were relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East Tertiary Institutions.

Research Question Two: In what ways has Pidgin English as a means of communication helped to unify students in the South East tertiary institutions?

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Table 2: Mean Response on ways Pidgin English has helped to Unify Students in the South East Tertiary Institutions

S/NO	Items	Mean	Std	Remark
1.	The cohesion of students from different ethnic group under the subsuming Nigerian institution is possible through Pidgin English.	3.20	1.51	Agreed
2.	The only language in the school that indexes the spirit of togetherness is Pidgin English	2.63	1.65	Agreed
3.	Students like to study with the use of Pidgin English.	2.42	1.73	Disagreed
4.	Most often than not, activities conducted in Pidgin English are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays.	3.43	1.20	Agreed
5.	Pidgin English is acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance.	2.71	1.46	Agreed
	Grand mean	**2.89**	**1.51**	

Table 2 showed that the respondents in items 1, 2, 4, and 5 agreed that Pidgin English as a means of communication could help to unify students in the South East tertiary institutions in the following ways: the cohesion of students from different ethnic group under the subsuming Nigerian institution could be possible through Pidgin English; the only language in the school that indexed the spirit of togetherness was Pidgin English; most often than not, activities conducted in Pidgin English were reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays and; Pidgin English is acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance while, they disagreed with the item 3 only. Furthermore, the grand mean and standard deviation are 2.89 and 1.51. This implies that a good number of the respondents believe that Pidgin English as a means of communication could help to unify students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Research Question Three: How has Pidgin English as a means of communication unified students in the South East tertiary institutions?

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Table 3: Mean Response on how Pidgin English has unified students in the South East Tertiary Institutions.

S /N	Items	Mean	Std.	Remark
1	Pidgin English is a dynamic and widely spoken language that has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in all tertiary institutions in the country	3.98	1.56	Agreed
2.	Today, Pidgin English is spoken and understood by millions of students across different regions and social strata, serving as a common language for communication in different contexts.	3.41	1.20	Agreed
3.	Nigerian Pidgin English is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, history, and everyday life.	2.62	1.68	Agreed
4.	Nigerian Pidgin English is an inferior form of English, the students do not like to use the language in school.	2.24	1.48	Disagreed
5.	There has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institutions.	3.08	1.34	Agreed
	Grand mean	**2.87**	**1.45**	

Table 3 revealed that respondents in items 1, 2, 3 and 5 with mean scores above 2.50 agreed that Pidgin English as a means of communication unified students in the South East tertiary institutions; while only the respondents in item 4 with mean scores of 2.24 disagreed. Again, the grand mean and standard deviation are 2.87 and 1.45. The implication is that many of the respondents believe that Pidgin English as a means of communication unifies students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one: There is no relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	R	Decision
Relevance of Pidgin English	2.85	1.48	0.73	Sig.
Unifying students				

Table 4 showed that since the calculated value of r, 0.73 is more than 0.5, the researcher accepted the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis. Which means that, there is relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the

South East tertiary institutions as; the r calculated value is above 0.5, showing that there is significant relationship between the two variables under study. Based on this, the researcher, therefore hold that, Pidgin English to an extent, is relevant (i.e. introducing NPE into the classroom environment can facilitate better communication and engagement among students, it is the language that brings all the supposed "students" of Nigeria to function as one, etc.), unifying the them in tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between Pidgin English as a means of communication and unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	R	Decision
Pidgin English as a means of communication	2.89	1.51	0.79	Sig.
Unifying students				

Table 5 showed that since the calculated value of r, 0.79 is more than 0.5, the researcher accepted the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis. Which means that there was significant relationship between Pidgin English as a means of communication and unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions as; the r calculated value is above 0.5, showing that there is significant relationship between the two variables under study. Based on this, the researcher therefore asserts that, Pidgin English as a means of communication (i.e, by the cohesion of students from different ethnic group under the subsuming Nigerian institution is possible through it, the only language in the school that indexes the spirit of togetherness is Pidgin English, etc.), unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis three: Pidgin English as a means of communication cannot unify the students in the South East tertiary institutions.

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Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	R	Decision
Pidgin English	2.87	1.45	0.67	Sig.
Cannot unify the Students				

Table 6 showed that since the calculated value of r, 0.67 is more than 0.5, the researcher accepted the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis. Which means that Pidgin English as a means of communication could unify the students in the South East tertiary institutions as; the r calculated value is above 0.5, showing that there is significant relationship between the two variables under study. Based on this, the researcher, therefore posits that Pidgin English as a means of communication through (a dynamic and widely spoken Pidgin English which has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in all tertiary institutions in the country; as a result, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institutions, etc.) unifying the students in the South East tertiary institutions.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 indicated that there was relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions. This is in line with the alternative hypothesis earlier postulated. Further assessment showed that Pidgin English to an extent, is relevant (i.e. Introducing NPE into the classroom environment can facilitate better communication and engagement among students, it is the language that brings all the supposed“ students” of Nigeria to function as one, etc.), unifying them in tertiary institutions. The result is in line with that of Bamgbose (2021) who held that Pidgin English serves as the language of nationalism, concerned with political integration and efficiency of students in tertiary institutions. Supporting the findings, Edoh (2015) pointed out that Pidgin English is the language that brings all the supposed “nations”, “as well as students" of Nigeria to function as one, each ethnic group being a nation on its own with the Hausa nation, the Ibo nation, the Yoruba nation, the Edo nation, Jukunland, Tivland, Urhoboland, Ogoniland, etc., as examples.

Table 2 showed that there was significant relationship between Pidgin English as a means of communication and unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions. This is in agreement with the alternative hypothesis earlier postulated. Further assessment revealed that Pidgin English as a means of communication (i.e, by the cohesion of students from different ethnic group under the subsuming Nigerian institution is possible through it, the only language in the school that indexes the spirit of togetherness is Pidgin English, etc.), unifying students in the South East tertiary institutions. The finding is in consonant with the findings of Cleng (2010), who held that Pidgin English facilitates social communication and helps nurture mutual cooperation, noting that, in a tertiary institution it is a product of intense social communication and cooperation ‘among people’. For him, it equates a tertiary institution with a linguistic community. He therefore asserted that, “You must understand that the phrase 'tertiary institution' means a linguistic unit, a

linguistic community, depends always on intercourse, on a community of life."The development of any tertiary institution according to him, will come to a standstill without a medium of communication like Pidgin English in place. Wright (2012) also held a similar view when he stated that "a national community is inconceivable without a common language such as Pidgin English." Charson (2013) has made it clear that without communication social structuring amongst human beings would become impossible.

Table 3 indicated that Pidgin English as a means of communication has not unified the students in the South East tertiary institutions. This is in tandem with the alternative hypothesis earlier postulated. Further assessment revealed that Pidgin English as a means of communication through (a dynamic and widely spoken Pidgin English which has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in all tertiary institutions in the country; as a result, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institutions, etc.) unifying the students in the South East tertiary institutions. This finding is in conformity with Esiobu (2020) who posited that Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), simply referred to as "Broken English" or "pidgin," is dynamic and widely spoken language that has become an integral part of the linguistic landscape in Nigeria and by extension all tertiary institutions in the country. He noted that NPE has evolved over centuries through interactions between various ethnic groups, indigenous languages, and European colonizers. Dike (2017) observed that, today, it is spoken and understood by millions of Nigerians across different regions and social strata, serving as a common language for communication in different contexts. Although NPE was traditionally seen as a language of informal communication, recently, there has been a growing appreciation for the cultural and linguistic richness of Nigerian Pidgin English in our tertiary institutions. This has led to its increased use in entertainment, media, literature, everyday communication, as well as education (including secondary schools and tertiary institutions) (Dike, 2017). Nigerian Pidgin English is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, history, and everyday life. Integrating NPE into the curriculum provides students with an opportunity to explore their cultural heritage, understand the nuances of Nigerian society, and engage with authentic texts and materials written in Pidgin (Edet, 2021).

Conclusion

The unifying roles of Pidgin English in Nigeria tertiary institutions cannot be overemphasized. It is the language of integration in Nigeria as our previous discussions have shown. That could be why Abama (2020) reminded us that amidst the compounding complexities of Nigeria especially in relation to the question language. The only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness is Pidgin English. Most of the activities conducted in

indigenous languages are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays using Pidgin English in the school environment. This explains why even the colonial era when English had not attained its present level of ascendance in national and international affairs, political parties were formed in Pidgin English. This trend has necessarily survived until today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in Pidgin English. It is also acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance.

Recommendations

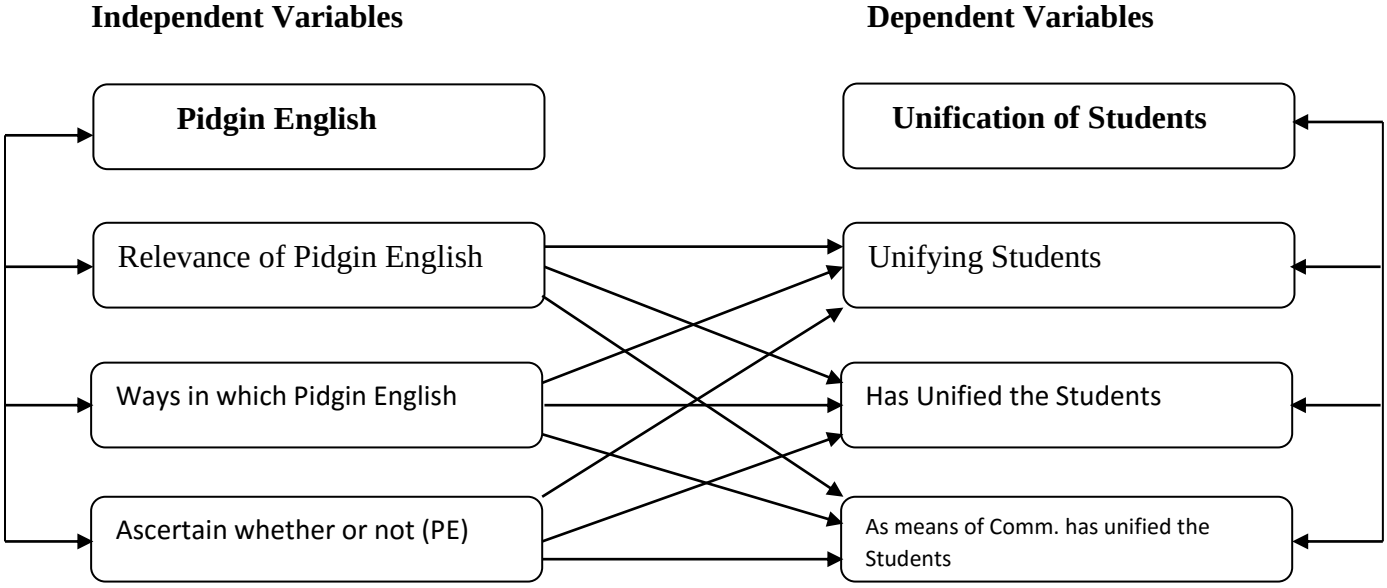
Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

1. Students should be encouraged to appreciate the importance of using Pidgin English in Nigeria tertiary institutions.
2. Ministries of education, curriculum planners and developers should outline the appropriate Pidgin English strategies to be used by lecturers to ensure better teaching and learning process.
3. Workshops/seminars should be organized by educational bodies to emphasize and enlighten the lecturers, students and education facilitators on the importance of the Pidgin English to the students.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge by probing the fundamental role of Pidgin English as a means of communication in unifying students in South East tertiary institutions cutting across finding out the relevance of Pidgin English in unifying students, ways in which it has helped as a means of communication and unified the students in the South East tertiary institutions. This study has contributed to knowledge by focusing on the relationship between Pidgin English as a means of communication and the unification of students in the institution. It also used the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East, Nigeria. Via: UNN-Enugu State, FUNAI-Eboyi State, IMSU-Imo State, NAU-Anambra State and ABSU-Abia State. Average of (80) respondents were randomly selected from different departments in each of the five (5) selected Federal/State Universities in the South East.. Here, survey research design was used and data were collected through primary source (questionnaire). The data was analyzed using simple percentage, mean statistics and PMCS. The final contribution to knowledge is presented in the model below:

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