Demystifying Reading Comprehension among Young ESL Learners: The Interaction Effect of Self Concept and Home Literacy Environment

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Abstract

This study determined the interaction effects of home literacy environment of pupils and their self-concept on reading comprehension in Oyo town. The study adopted the pretest-posttest control group quasi–experimental design using 3x2x2 factorial matrix. A total of 235 primary five pupils from six intact classes participated in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six primary schools in Oyo East, Oyo West and AtibaLocal Government Areas of Oyo State. ***The instruments used were*** *Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (r=0.91)****,*** *Questionnaire on Pupils' Self-concept (r=0.87) and pupils' Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire (r=0.76). Treatment lasted six weeks. Three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Findings revealed thatself concept had no significant main effect on students achievement in reading comprehension ($F_{(1,219)} = 1.40; p > 0.05;$ $^2 = .01$). **H**ome environment had a significant main effect on learners' achievement in reading comprehension ($F_{(1,219)} = 4.15; p < 0.05;$ $^2 = .010$). Similarly, the interaction effect of self concept and home environment on pupils achievement in reading comprehension is significant ($F_{(3,219)} = 2.05; p < 0.05;$ $^2 = .001$). Based on the findings, it is recommended that parents should provide favourable and supportive home environment for reading of English reading comprehension, while school counsellors should work on learners' self concepts in order improve their academic performance.*

Keywords: Self -concept, interaction, Literacy, achievement, reading comprehension

Introduction

Reading is a literacy language skill which is inevitable for learning. Without ability to read, opportunities for personal mental development may not be realised. Reading has been described variously by different scholars. To Ogunsiji (2004, reading is a process of communication involving the writer and the reader, the encoder and the decoder. Simply put, reading is a process of extracting meaning from written language. This implies that a learner cannot claim to have read until he/she is able to comprehend and bring out meaning from what he/she has read. According to Ezeokoli (2011), reading is the interpretation based on the ability of the reader to understand the purpose of the author as well as what the author is saying. Reading is not only a rapid recognition of verbal symbols but also an understanding of the thought and idea for which they stand. In a sense, reading comprehension has not taken place unless the reader is able to interpret what he/she has read.

The main purpose for reading is to comprehend the ideas in a text. Comprehension is the ultimate outcome of the act of reading (Awolere, 2016). Reading comprehension is among the most critical academic skills to be attained in school (Duke and Carlisle, 2011). However, in Nigeria, many young learners of English cannot read and understand well.

As central to academic achievement as reading is, Nigerian elementary school pupils do not fare well in reading comprehension. Studies have shown that most Nigerian primary chool students cannot read with adequate comprehension (Okere, 2012). According to Kolawole (2005), students have not fared well in reading because they have not acquired the basic skills for reading, without which they cannot perform effectively. This view was re-echoed by Adeyinka (2011).

To overcome the problems associated with reading comprehension, researchers such as Opoola (2009), and Anastasia (2012) have suggested the use of instructional strategies that could be of help to students in reading comprehension. These strategies include: evoker strategy, forced retrieval and questioning strategy and text-previewing.In spite of all the strategies being adopted by teachers, stakeholders have continued to decry the poor state of reading instruction in Nigerian schools as evidenced by poor teaching methodology. This explains why Okere (2012) remarks that Nigerian primary school pupils have not been sufficiently equipped with basic comprehension skills. In Nigeria, basal readers are commonly used for all pupils in many classrooms. Basal approach to teaching reading, according to Maduabuchi (2008), is derived from the word base or basic which involves using a series of books or readers tailored to a specific reading level. This approach, according to the scholar, has been used for centuries and is still being used today. It teaches reading through a series of books that have been written especially for that purpose. Although this approach has several advantages, like providing the teachers with pre-planned lesson and the tools needed for accessing students' reading abilities and providing arranged books in a logical sequence of increasing difficulty, yet, researchers such as Howel (2008) and Shay(2014) have criticised it because the approach is too rigid and does not engage students. Oftentimes the stories do not match students' interest, making it hard to capture the attention of the reluctant readers. Howell (2008) Shayia (2014) and Maduabuchi 2008) have contended that basal approach does not meet the needs of talented readers; it is similar to conventional method.

Judging from the foregoing, scholars have paid more attention to the improvement of the process of teaching reading in schools. Their efforts include proposing instructional strategies that are learner-centred such as visual literacy and the use of advance organiser in reading comprehension. Although the strategies are learner-centred and are in favour of engaging students in the teaching learning process of reading, none of them takes into consideration the young learners' self concept and home literacy environment of learners.Among many factors have been found in literature as capable of influencing learners' attitude towards learning in general

and English language comprehension in particular are learners' self concept and home literacy environment (Fakeye, 2010 and Ogunyemi 2014).

Thesevariables can interact with instruction to influence learning outcomes especially in ESL reading comprehension classroom. Home literacy environment can be favourable or unfavourable. Homes that are supportive of the education of the child's education is regarded as favourable, while the ones that are not supportive of the child education are unfavourable. Studies have shown that children who have a favourable home environment where parents provide books, take interest in and monitor their children's education tend to do well in school. Thus, home literacy environment appears to be a strong determinant of academic success. Adeyinka (2011) says that the home environmentof children, as measured by father's education, occupation, mother's education and stock of books in the home stands out as strong variable in school achievement. This postulation agrees with Igubor (2014) that parental involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influence on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive skills.

Another important factor that can influence learning outcomes is self-concept. Pyszczynski (2011) refer to self concept as a collection of belief about one's own nature, uniqueness, qualities and typical behaviour. It is one's mental picture about oneself. Also, Ezeokoli and Fasan (2013) define self-concept as the ordered set of attitudes and perceptions that an individual holds about himself /herself. Learners' perceptions of the fit between their self –concept and the academic demands are important for learning outcomes. A child who sees himself/herself as top ranking or as a scholar may set his or her goal on the attainment of the highest grade in the class. To be precise, self- concept is a conjunction of attitude, feeling and knowledge about one's abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability. It may be negative or positive.

Research on self-concept and second- language learning has shown that it is an important affective variable in successful language acquisition. Specifically, self - concept and reading comprehension are shown to go hand in hand. Studies have also shown that positive self-concept can affect achievement in reading comprehension (Dambudzo, 2009). This is in consonance with Loree, 2011; Leary, 2011). On the contrary, however, Trusty, Watts and House (1996) did not see a concurrent relationship between the children' academic achievement and self-concept.

Statement of the Problem

English language is a core subject in primary school curriculum and success or failure in it determines the extent to which pupils will go in their educational pursuit in life. However, reports from studies have indicated that pupils in primary schools are read and comprehend poorly in English language. Research efforts aimed at improving learners' achievement in reading comprehension has led researchers to come up with learner-centred strategies such as reciprocal teaching, pre-reading discussion and partner reading for teaching of reading comprehension. Though these studies provide useful insights into the teaching and learning of reading comprehension to young learners, but they have not translated to significant improvement in performance. This might be because the interaction effects of learners' self-concept and literacy home background were not examined. Studies have shown that these two variables influenced learning outcomes in Social Studies, Mathematics and the sciences. However, the interaction effects of the two variables on learning outcomes in reading comprehension have not been adequately investigated in Oyo town. This study, therefore, determined theinteraction effects of home literacy environment of pupils and their self-concept on reading comprehension in Oyo town.

Hypotheses

Based on the stated problem, the following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho$_1$: ***Ho$_2$***: There is no significant effect of self-concept on pupils' achievement in reading comprehension.

Ho$_2$: There is no significant main effect of home literacy environment on pupils' achievement in reading comprehension.

Ho$_3$: There is no significant interaction effect of self-concept and home literacy environment on pupils' achievement in reading comprehension.

Scope of the Study

This study covered primary five in six intact classes from six purposively selected primary schools from three local government areas (Atiba, Oyo West, Oyo East) in Oyo Central Senatorial District of Oyo State. The study also determined the interaction effect of home literacy environment and self-concept on their learning outcomes in reading comprehension.

Significance of the Study

This study is beneficial to language teachers as it provides insight into affective and social factors that could promote reading comprehension among young ESL learners in primary schools.

The findings of this study will also improve teachers' knowledge and skills in the teaching of reading comprehension. Similarly, the findings of the study would provide useful information to curriculum planners and policy makers in education on alternative variables that could enhance reading comprehension instruction at primary schools.

Literature Review

The home literacy environment of children, as measured by the parents' education and occupation, the number of books in the home and even the socio-economic status of the parents is a variable in explaining differences in learners' attitude to learning. It has also been established that such variables as: family, school, society and motivation factors are strong determinants of learners' attitude towards learning (Aremu, 2000). Okunlola (2004) submitted that home factors such as socio-economic status, educational background, home type, parental involvement and family size influence learners' attitude to learning. Toheed (2012) supported this idea by pointing out some family factors that are related to attitude to learning. Such factors are: parent-child relationship, parent divorce, step families, single-mother family and working mothers.

The kind of the family structure a child comes from determines whether he/she will have positive attitude to learning or not. Amato (2005) observed that the children that grow up in stable, two-parent families have higher standard of living, receive more efficient parenting, are emotionally closer to both parents, and are subject to fewer stressful events and circumstances. As a result, these children will be emotionally stable and show more positive attitude towards learning in schools than those from the single-parents families. Adeyemo (2010), in support, opined that children from a natural and stable home usually have more positive attitude towards school and thus would be enthused to participate actively in reading activities.

It has been revealed that children from single-parent families show negative attitude towards learning. Baiyewu (2009) asserted that such children are less supervised and there is also less communication between them and their parents. He specifically made a reference that the children of single-mothers grow up with deviant behaviours. As a result, the children will find it difficult to cooperate with classmates, share equipment, be attentive during lessons, and may also fail to follow teacher's instructions. In the same vein, Okunlola (2004) observed that a single-mother parenting could have adverse effect on children's socialization and physical, mental and emotional development.

The children from illiterate and poor homes, due to lack of support, may show negative attitude to learning. Akinsanya, Ajayi and Salomi (2011) observed that the children from well educated homes enjoy a lot of support, such as decent and good environment for academic work, parental support and guidance more than their counterparts from poor homes.

The rate of parents' involvements in their children's school life is also a factor related to children's attitude to learning. Gadson and Ray (2003) found that fathers who are moderately or highly involved in their wards school life had children who were significantly more likely to receive high marks. Mboya and Nesengani (1999) also stated that the high absentee rate of working men in rural areas of South Africa had a negative influence on their children's attitude to school activities.

The home environment of a child is another factor that influences the learning attitude of children in schools. The family harmony which is indexed in peaceful co-existence of the members impacts positively on the children that grew up in such a family. This is because the type of home a child comes from affects the learning behaviour of the child (Adeyemo, 2010). A suitable home environment for learners will encourage positive attitude, and school love and affection. Adeyemo (2010) and Okunlola (2004) posited that children from the natural and stable home environment usually had a more positive attitude towards learning.

Self- concept and academic achievement are often linked, and a higher self concept has been said to associate with better academic achievement (Marsh, 1990). This explains why Lovise (2011) emphasizes the need for educators to understand and appreciate the importance of self concept in education, thus : "An overwhelming body of contemporary research points instantly to the relationship between self- concept and academic achievement and suggest strongly that self-concept can no longer be ignored by parents and teachers"

Learners' self-concept may have an effect on their achievement. Underachievers commonly have negative self-concept, and in turn these students do not always seem diligent enough to use and modify proper strategies when it comes to challenging tasks (Carr 2011). Also, students who choose poor strategies or do not have adequate skills to solve problems may develop a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed (Galbrait, 2011). This will cause those learners to begin avoiding situations where they may feel embarrassed because they do not want to take the risk of failure.

Sweet (2011) reported in a study done in that self-concept is more likely to affect reading levels rather than reading levels affecting self-concept. More specifically, the study found that positive self-concept leads to increase in reading comprehension. This researcher states that students who feel that they are strong readers will always try to read books even when they seem difficult.

From the perspective of Pyszczynski (2011), self-concept provides a buffer against anxiety which in turn helps maintain a psychological well-being and helps with performance in reading comprehension. By having positive self-concept, level of anxiety can be controlled, and learners are able to function more successfully and cope with more challenges than without it.

Judging from the submissions of researchers whose works were reviewed in this study, there is a strong positive correlation between self-concept and academic achievement.

Methodology

The study adopted thepretest-posttest, control group quasi–experimental design using 3x2x2 factorial matrix. A total of 235 primary five pupils participated in the study. The subjects were drawn from six intact classes. Purpose sampling technique was used to select six primary schools in Oyo East, Oyo West and Atiba local government areas of Oyo State. The selection of schools was based on the following criteria:

1. Availability of qualified teachers of English language for primary five.
2. The schools must be far from one another.
3. The school must be willing to participate. Three instruments were used in the study. They are Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (r=0.91), Questionnaire on Pupils' Self-concept (r=0.87) and pupils' Home Literacy Environment Questionnaire (r=0.76). Two qualified teachers of English Language from the selected schools were contacted to obtain their consent to participate in the study. The researcher thereafter embarked on one-week training for teachers in the use of appropriate teaching strategies employing the already prepared teachers' guides. The instruments were thereafter administered on the pupils. Data collected were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) which was used to test all the hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at $P < 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

Ho_1: There is no significant main effect of self-concept onpupils' achievement in reading comprehension

Table 4.1: Summary of Analysis of covariance of posttest achievement by home literacy environment and self concept

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2368.810[a]	13	182.216	28.299	.000	.627
Intercept	1445.287	1	1445.285	224.457	.000	.506
Pre-achievement	1197.077	1	1197.077	185.909	.000* .	.459
Self-concept	8.997	1	8.997	1.397	.238	.006
Home background	.936	1	.936	4.145	.003 .	.001
Self-concept x Home background	.281	1	.281	2.044	.000	.010
Error	1410.152	219	6.439			
Total	32038.000	233				
Corrected Total	3778.961	232				

Significant at P<.05

Table 4.1 reveals that self concept had no significant main effect on students achievement in reading comprehension ($F_{(1,219)} = 1.40; p > 0.05; ^2 = .01$). Therefore, $H0_1$ is not rejected.

Ho_2: There is no significant main effect of home background on students' achievement in reading comprehension.

Table 4.1 shows that home environment of the pupils had a significant main effect on learners' achievement in reading comprehension ($F_{(1,219)} = 4.15; p < 0.05; ^2 = .010$). Therefore, $H0_2$ is rejected.

Ho_3: There is no significant interaction effect of self-concept and home literacy environment on pupils' achievement in reading comprehension.

Table 4.1 shows that the interaction effect of self concept and home environment onpupils achievement in reading comprehension is significant ($F_{(3,219)} = 2.05; p < 0.05; ^2 = .001$). Therefore, Ho_3 is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Main Effect of Pupils Home Literacy environment on pupils' Achievement in English Reading Comprehension

Students' home environment was found to have a significantmain effect on their achievement in reading comprehension. This finding is not surprising when one takes into consideration the fact thathome background has the potential to influence pupils' academic success. This finding agrees with several studies which found correlation between home background of learners'academic achievement among which are Adeyemo (2010), Fanus (2011), Adiambo, Odwar and Mildred(2011) and Toheed (2012).

Interaction Effects of Self Concept and Home literacy Environment

Findings from this study indicated that there was a significant two -way interaction effects of home literacy environment and self concept on achievement on learners' achievement in English comprehension. This could be attributed to the fact that these variables are effective in promoting learning.This supports the finding of Akinsowon (2016), and Icheku (2017) who in separate studies reported significant interaction effects of the moderator variables on learners; achievement.

Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that the main effect of home literacy environment as well as the interaction effect of self concept and home environment were significant on achievement in English reading comprehension. It could be concluded that ESL learners' poor performance in reading comprehension could be effectively tackled through the interaction ofself concept and home literacy environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Parents should provide favourable and supportive home environment for reading of English reading comprehension.

Also, school counsellors should work on learners' self concepts in order improve their academic performance

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