The Role of Attitude and Verbal Ability in English Language Achievement among Senior Secondary School Students in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

***T**his study investigated the extent to which attitude and verbal ability influenced senior secondary school students' achievement in English Language in Ibadan, Nigeria. Using the descriptive research design, three research questions were answered. Participants were 500 senior secondary two students from 10 senior secondary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria. Questionnaires on Students' Attitude (r= .77), Verbal Ability Test (r= .72) and Achievement tests in English Language (r= 0.81) were used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression at .05 level. There was a positive relationship between verbal ability (r=.16) attitude(r=.50) and achievement in English Language. Verbal ability (β=.-097) and attitude (β = .311,) made relative contributions to achievement in English The joint contribution of the independent variables to achievement in English were also significant. It is, therefore, recommended that English Language instruction should take cognisance of these students' variables for better results.*

Key words: Verbal ability, Attitude, Predictors, Achievement, English Language

Introduction

The English Language in Nigeria enjoys a prestigious status, having a high premium placed on it as the nation's official language. It is the language of administration, trade, commerce, and industry, as well as international communication. Most importantly, English is the language of integration. It has been able to unify the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria, thereby enabling cross communication and co-existence. As a result, Fakeye (2020) posited that the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of Nigeria polity and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language on the other have led to the English language as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication. English is also the language of instruction in Nigerian schools as well as the language of science and technology. The National Policy on Education (NPE 2013) stipulates that English shall be the language of instruction in schools right from the upper primary to the tertiary level. The NPE also stipulates that every student should learn one of the three major Nigerian languages in addition to his/her MT. The terminal objectives of the English language cited by Atanda and Jaiyeoba (2011) include: providing pupils and students with a sound linguistic basis for further learning in secondary, tertiary and vocational institutions; equipping school learners with a satisfactory level of proficiency in the English language usage in their places of work; promoting the art of spoken English as medium for national and international communication; enhancing and developing further the various skills and competence already acquired at primary and junior secondary level. It is recognised as the official language and the language of education in Nigeria. Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) have pointed out that the English language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because it acts as a school subject from primary one through higher institution and on the other hand the medium of instruction from primary four to tertiary institution, to that effect all the school subjects are taught in the English language except the Nigerian languages as revealed in the National Policy on Education (2013).

Recently, the continued adoption of English as the language of instruction and the national recognition accorded to the three major indigenous Nigerian languages have come under heavy criticism. Adegbola (2018) have raised an alarm over the continued relegation of our indigenous languages to the background and have advocated for not only assignment of greater responsibilities to them but also for their use as complementary languages of instruction in schools. This is a way of encouraging the growth and development of these languages. The growth and development of the English language in Nigeria and its use as the language of instruction have been a two edged sword, manifesting positive and negative effects to the plurilinguistic environment of Nigeria (Ogunsiji and Fakeye, 2014). On the positive side, it plays prominent roles in the overall development of both the individual and the society at large, binding the diverse ethno-cultural groups in Nigeria together, fostering unity and promoting peaceful co-existence among people of different cultural realities. Besides, it has given Nigeria access to the rest of the world.

The English language in addition to being the language of instruction is also a compulsory subject that must be passed at almost every level of education in Nigeria, at primary school it is an important subject the students will write examination in before going into the secondary school. In junior secondary and senior secondary schools, it is a subject to be passed for anybody to advance further. However, reports from public examination bodies like WAEC, for instance on yearly basis, has pointed to the fact that students are not doing well.

Even the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) brochure emphasized that candidate registering for the UTME must have at least five credits to include the English language before he/she can be offered admission into any University (JAMB, 2020). Take for instance, a candidate with C6 in all subjects with English language will be offered admission while a candidate with 8As without the English language will not be offered admission into any university. Even at this time, considering the importance of the English language in academics, every student that is admitted into the tertiary institution of any kind: colleges, polytechnics and the universities, must take and pass the Use of English as a compulsory subject before he/she qualifies for graduation from any tertiary institution.

Olakunde(2020) also highlight problems in the area of methodology, materials, overpopulation, attitude, teacher quality and quantity, students inability to write English language well to mention a few. They also observe

through their findings that failure in other subjects may be as result of not having a sufficient sound background in English language since instruction in all these subjects are in English language. Adeleye (2016) advances the reason that students are not able to express themselves well in writing or letter writing, summary and comprehension aspects. Thus, the quest to find solutions to the poor performance of students in English language has made a lot of scholars to carry out different researches. Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) pointed out in their study that students perform poorly in English language at public examinations in recent times. They stated further that the poor performance of students in English language has been the major cause of decline in academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria. To them, when students lack the requisite competence in the English language, they tend to have a lot of difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum taught in English language.

Despite all the researches that have tried to address students poor performance, one still discover that students performance have not improve significantly; perhaps it is because certain students with some factors such as verbal ability and students' attitude in relation to how they affect their performance in English has not been combined in a study.

One factor that can affect students' performance is verbal ability. Verbal ability has been described as a measure of language development level of an individual and also as a measure of linguistic reasoning and problem solving ability of an individual (Adefunke, 2019). Effective interaction with and discussion of any text material would require a relatively high verbal ability. Herman (1990), states that the verbal ability of an individual language learner will determine performance in that language at both reading and writing levels. Verbal ability of a person could be high, average or low (Ayaniyi, 2009). Factors that can influence learners' verbal ability include the environment, socio-economic status of the home and childhood attitudes (Fakeye, 2010). According to Ayaniyi (2009), learners with high verbal ability perform better than others with lower verbal ability. Also, other studies (Olagbaju, 2014), have shown that learners that have high verbal ability tend to achieve higher than learners that have lower verbal ability in reading comprehension. On the contrary, Berkman (2012) states that a learner with a high verbal ability may not perform better than a learner with lower verbal ability all things being equal. Ayaniyi (2009), also notes that verbal ability does not have any effect on learners' academic performance. Ezenandu, (2011) also found no significant effect of verbal ability on senior secondary students' attitude to prose literature. In view of differing statements on the place of verbal ability on learners' achievement, this study will further investigate the variable with respect to self-efficacy and attitude among senior secondary school students.

Another factor that can affect students' performance is attitude. Attitude is the general feeling or opinion about acquisition of knowledge or skill gained through education. Gök & Sılay (2010) defines attitude as a mental concept that depicts favourable or unfavourable feelings toward an object. Ajzen& Fishbein (2010), Social psychologists have viewed attitudes as having three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive component is a set of beliefs about how an object and its assessment is performed using paper-and-pencil tests. The affective component includes feelings about an object and its assessment is performed by using psychological indices. Also, the behavioral component pertains to the way in which people act toward an object and its assessment is performed with directly observed behaviors. Students' attitudes towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context may all play some part in explaining their success in learning a language (Candlin & Mercer, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools seems unsatisfactory as demonstrated by the poor achievement of students at public examinations. Scholars have attributed the problem to the way teaching and learning of English language are handled in the classroom. Three of the factors that have been identified as accounting for poor students' achievement in general are verbal ability, self-efficacy and students' attitude on students' academic achievement. However, most of these researches focused on other school subjects such as Literature in English, Mathematics and Biology. The extent to which these students' personal factors could predict students' achievement in English language has not enjoyed much research attention especially in Ibadan. Therefore, the study investigated the extent to which verbal ability and attitude would influence students' achievement in English language in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the independent variables (verbal ability and attitude) and students' achievement in English?
2. What is the relative contribution of students' factors (verbal ability and attitude) to achievement in English?
3. What is the joint contribution of verbal ability and attitude) to students' achievement in English?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive research design The target population for this study consisted of 500 senior secondary school two (SSS2) students from 10 schools (50 per school) in Ibadan Metropolis. The instruments used in data collection were: Questionnaire on students' attitude to English language (r=0.77),Verbal ability (r=0.68) and Achievement Test in English Language (r=0.81). The instruments were administered to the participants and collected back on the spot. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1:

What is the relationship between Students' Verbal Ability, Attitude and achievement in English?

Table 1 : Correlation matrix of Attitude and Verbal Ability and achievement in English

	Academic Achievement	Attitude	Verbal Ability	Mean	Std. Dev.
Academic Achievement	1				
Attitude to English Language	.501**	1			
Verbal Ability	.160**	.655**	1		

* Sig. at P < .05 level

The results from table 1 above shows that there was a positive relationship between Achievement, Attitude (r=.501) and Verbal Ability (r=.160).

Research Question 2:

What is the relative contribution of each of the independent variables (Attitude and Verbal Ability) to Achievement in English?

Table 2: Showing relative contribution of the independent variables (Attitude and Verbal Ability) to Achievement. In English

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.	Remark
	B	Std. Error	B			
(Constant)	-10.0881	1.079		-10.087	.000	
Attitude	.175	.023	.311	7.587	.000	
Verbal Ability	-.152	.059	-.097	-2.560	.011	

Table 2 reveals the relative contribution of the two independent variables to the dependent variable, expressed as beta weights, viz: Attitude(β = .311) and Verbal Ability(β = -.097). Results above show that the two independent made relative contribution to achievement in English.

Research Question 3

What is the joint contribution of independent variables (Verbal Ability and Attitude) to Academic Achievement in English?

Table 3: Multiple regression showing joint contribution of Students' Verbal Ability, Self-Efficacy, Attitude and Achievement in English language

R	R Square			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
.789	.622			.620	2.030	
A N O V A						
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	3367.916	2	1122.639	272.550	.000	Sig.
Residual	2043.034	496	4.119			
Total	5410.950	499				

Table 3 shows that the joint contribution of the two independent variables to achievement in English was significant. The table also shows a coefficient of multiple correlation (R) of .789 and a multiple R^2 of .622. This means that 62.7% of the total variance in the academic achievement is accounted for by all the two independent variables when taken together.

Discussion of Findings

The study showed that the relative contributions of students' verbal ability, and attitude to students' achievement in English language are significant. The findings were consistent with those of Olagbaju (2014) and Fakeye (2020), who found in their separate studies that learners that have high verbal ability achieve higher than learners that have lower verbal ability in reading comprehension. This finding also corroborated with Adegbola (2018) who observed there was significant interaction between verbal ability and students' scores in English language and concluded that verbal ability predicts how successful a learner would be in English language. This might be as a result of the fact that verbal ability has been identified in literatures as an essential factor that influences students' achievement.

The study also revealed that the relative contribution of students' attitude to achievement in English language was also significant. The study also, corroborates the popular belief that the student must exhibit a positive attitude which will affect students' learning in a positive way. It is also in line with the view of Olagbaju (2014), that positive attitude more often than not leads to successful learning. Keil (2011) and Olagbaju (2014) in their separate studies found out that positive attitudes will promote learning while negative attitudes inhibit learning. They further said that achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning material. This may be due to the fact that attitudes have been identified in literatures as vital factor that influences students' academic performance.

However, the study negates those of Ayanniyi (2009); and Ezenandu (2011) who in separate studies found out that a learner with a high verbal ability does not perform better than a learner with lower verbal ability and that verbal ability does not have any effect on learners' academic performance. This study also negates that of Brindley (2004) who studied the attitude of Japanese foreign language learners; the results showed weak correlations between attitude measures and English language. Findings of this study also negates that of Brindley (2004) who found that positive attitudes towards English were irrelevant to Israelis learning and using English. The disparity in these findings may be the different socio-cultural environment in which the study took place or different level of participants used in the studies. The above strongly shows that verbal ability, self-efficacy and attitude are good variables predicting students' achievement.

Conclusion

It could be concluded from this study that for effective teaching and learning in schools, efforts should not only be concentrated on improving teaching methods rather other learner variables such as verbal ability and attitude should be properly addressed.

Recommendations

Teachers of English Language should adopt good teaching skills and attractive classroom practices that could help to engender positive attitude from the students to the subject. School counselors must ensure that they provide counseling services that can help students improve their attitudes. In addition to this, students should engage in practice of English expressions that will make them use English orally so as to develop their verbal ability as well as improve their performance in English language.

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