

Students' Personal Variables as Correlates of Academic Achievement in English as a Second Language in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The study was designed to find out the relationship between students personal variables such attitude and academic ability and their achievement in English Language: Four Research Questions were generated for the Study in Lagos State. The instruments used were Questionnaire on Students' Attitude to English (QSAE) and Students' Academic Ability Test (SAAT), four hundred 400) senior Secondary II (SSII) Students randomly selected from five (5) secondary schools were involved in the study. A correlational Analysis was run on the variables and their annual scores in English and t-test calculated. The result of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between Students' Attitude and their academic achievement in English Language. It also showed significant difference in the academic ability of male and female students with male students having higher academic ability mean scores. Based on the findings of the research, recommendations were made that teachers, should evolve effective teaching and learning strategies to develop students positive attitude to English Language; school administrators should encourage regular attendance of English Language teachers at seminars and workshops to keep them abreast of innovation in the teaching of the subject that can improve students attitude; parents should create conducive home environments for their children to improve their attitudes to English Language; and that teachers of English should consider varying academic ability of learners when planing instructional programmes for them.

INTRODUCTION

Presently, Nigeria Secondary School Students have problems in the learning of English Language as revealed in their performance in the subject at public examinations (Kolawole 1998; Anoma 2005). Most of the students are being delayed from advancing in their studies to higher schools of learning because of their inability to obtain a credit pass in the subject, which is a pre-requisite for admission into any course in the tertiary institutions (Fakeye 2002). Many of the students normally pass every other subject but English Language and an excellent performance in other subjects without a credit pass in English in non-effectual.

Evidence abound (Oyeyebi 1998; Adeosun 2004) to show that students have not been doing well in the Language. Anyone who is familiar with English Language examination scripts in the secondary school today will not disagree with the view that the standard of English in secondary school has fallen to a low level. This low standard of English is reflected in the large number of candidates who fail the school certificate English every year as shown in the table of WAEC result 2000-2003 in (Table 1).

In 2000, the failure rate was 44.07 in 2001, it was 43.02% in 2002, it was 42.61% while in 2003,

failure rate was 33%. With the data in the table, the failure rate each year is certainly greater than the pass rate (except in 2003). This is certainly disturbing and something urgent has to be done to get students out of this nagging problem. The percentage of students eligible for admission into tertiary institutions (Grade 1-6 in English) is less than 30% each year. This no doubt, is an ugly scene. Scholars have advanced reasons for this woeful performance in English Language over the years. Some other studies have identified learner variables, which may enhance or retard students learning of English language such variables are motivation, interest, age, intelligence, aptitude cognitive style and learner personality (Fakeye 2002; Anoma 2005).

The fact remains that the standard of spoken and written English of today's secondary school students cannot be compared with that of their

Table 1: Statistics of entries and results for SSCE, WAEC, English language 2000-2003

Year	No of Candidates	Percentage		
		Grade 1-6	Grade 7-8	Grade F9
2000	850479	14.88	34.29	44.07
2001	1025027	26.07	30.90	43.02
2002	909888	24.57	32.81	42.61
2003	929271	27.03	34.45	33.00

Source: Department of Statistics, West African Examination Council (WAEC) Lagos, 2004.

predecessors during or shortly after the colonial periods. (Fakeye 2002). According to him, the reasons are obvious. One major reason advanced by him is the poor attitude of some English language teachers to work and students' lack of enthusiasm and interest in the subject.

From the above it could be seen that a number of students' variables may determine students' performance in the Senior Secondary English language. Students' attitude to the language is one of the personal variables that affect the learning of English language. Researchers have stressed the importance of developing favourable attitudes as a means of enhancing performance in the learning of second language like English.

Ige (1996), in relating attitude to achievement under some teaching strategies, concluded among other things on the relationship between academic ability and student's achievement in English language the attitude will guide teachers to plan their lesson for different ability groups in the class. He concluded by saying that factors in turn produce poor achievement and in turn produce negative attitude to the subject.

Several researchers and scholars have reported a link between academic ability and achievement in the learning of English language. Using a variety of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests and different methods of assessing language learning, Ige (1996) and Fakeye (2002) concluded that intellectual ability (academic ability) was a good means of predicting how successful a learner would be at language learning in general and English as a second language (ESL) learning in particular.

In his own submission, Lightbown (1993) submitted that intelligence is more strongly related to the development of reading, grammar and vocabulary, it was unrelated to oral productive skill. Byrne (1993) corroborated the findings of Lightbown (1993). He studied English as a second language and found that academic ability of the learners was a determining factor of performance in reading, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and writing but not of spoken English.

In different studies, Anthony (1990), Long (1991) found that intelligence was highly related to performance in reading, dictation and writing tasks but not on listening comprehension and free oral tasks. These findings suggest that intelligence is more related to those second language (that is, reading, language analysis, writing and vocabulary study) but intelligence is

much less likely to influence the way in which oral communication skills are developed. Those findings were corroborated by Byrne (1993) and Anderson (1991).

Vigotsky (1961) *suggested* that success in learning a language is closely linked with intelligence. This view is corroborated by Stubbs (1976) that children who score higher in test of academic ability perform better than those who score very low in language learning. Onwukeme (1986) opined that students with high academic ability, even if from unfavourable home background tend to perform better in language tasks than students with low academic ability perform better than those who score very low in language learning.

Kolawole (1998) *opined* that students with high academic ability, even if from unfavourable home background tend to perform better in language tasks than students with low academic ability. This declaration is corroborated by Adeosun (2004) who notes that academic ability of the learner determines their language adequacy and the extent to which proficiency is attained in a language.

The above research findings point to the fact the intelligence (academic ability) and attitude are strong factors when it comes to the learning of a second language in classroom, particularly, if the instruction is formal. The inference that can be drawn is that when classroom instruction, is less formal, intelligence or academic ability is less important. Hence, ability may play a less important role. This study tries to find out the relationship between, students personal variables attitude and academic ability and their achievement in English language in selected secondary schools in Lagos State.

Researches have identified various factors as influencing language learning. Perhaps the most important of these factors is the question of attitude on that of the learner. According to Adebisi (2006) attitudes are positive or negative feelings that an individual holds about objects or ideas. In his own submission, King (1981) declared that attitudes are generally regarded as enduring though modifiable by experience and or persuasion and are also learnt rather than innate. He went further to say that achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning materials. This is general belief that a positive attitude more often than not lead to successful learning. There is an

abundant research on the relationship between attitude and language learning. Gardener and Lambert (1972) cited in Adebisi (2006) identified two independent factors underlying the development of skill in learning a second language there are intellectual capacity and an appropriate attitudinal orientation towards the particular language.

This report is corroborated by Kolawole (1998). However, in another study, Gardener and Lambert (1972) observed that success in mastering a second language depends not so much on intellectual capacity or, language aptitude as on the learner's attitude towards the particular language. According to them, attitude could help the language learning process by changing student's orientations towards particular linguistic cultural groups and there by modify their motivation to learn that language. King (1981) cited in Fakeye (2002) found that a positive attitude towards English language accounts for success in learning it among the Canadian bilingual. This finding was re-echoed by Larsen – Freeman (1990) when he reported that American college students' positive attitude towards German and towards them speaking German were correlated with proficiency in German.

On the question of age and attitude to language learning, Brumfit (1991) found in research no positive relationship between attitude factors and the proficiency in French of six year old Anglophone Canadians. These findings are corroborated by Cook (1991) and Byrne (1993) when they revealed that attitudinal factors in language learning is age-dependent.

According to Anoma (2005), those children who had been studying English for five years showed a significantly higher level of positive attitude towards the learning of English than the group who had just started to study English. She also found out that lower proficiency learners showed significantly more prejudice than higher proficiency group. In the views of Adeosun (2004), in a typical language learning situation, there are a number of people whose attitude to each other can be significant, the learner, the teacher, the learner's peers and parents and the speakers of the language. Each relationship will be shown to be a factor controlling the learner's motivation to acquire the language.

Adelabu (1998) reported that three reasons explain the negative attitude to the learning of English language by secondary school students:

- 1 Most students hate English language because of poor results recorded yearly in school certificate examination.
- 1 Teachers do not often engender positive attitude because they use bad method to teach the subject
- 1 The teachers do not have a thorough grasp of the instructional content and procedure.

Statement of the Problem

The poor performance of Student in English Language at Senior School Certificate Examination in recent times has been attributed to certain student personal variable such as Academic Ability and Attitudes. The study, therefore examined the relationship between

Academic Ability and Attitudes of Senior Secondary School Students and their achievements in English Language in selected secondary schools in Lagos State.

Research Questions

Based on the stated problem, this study sought to provide answers to the following research question.

1. Is there any relationship between students' Attitude and Academic Ability and their Achievement in English language?
2. Is the relationship between students' Attitude and Academic Ability and their Achievement in English language positive or negative?
3. Is there any significant difference in the Attitude and Academic Ability of Male and Female student in relation to their Achievement in English language?
4. What is the attitude of the students towards English language?

Significance of the Study

Reports from researchers have revealed that the current state of students' performance in English language at public examination leaves much to be desired. Studies have shown that students' Personal variables could be held accountable for this ugly trend. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between students' variables such as Attitude and academic and students' Achievement in English language in selected secondary schools in Lagos State, thus providing insights into those personal variables that interfere with instruction to provide better results in English Language.

The findings will also help government, teachers, school administrators, psychologists, parents and students to understand the seriousness of the problem with a view to taking steps to improve students' learning of English language. Also, it would be useful to the guidance counselors who as behaviour modifiers will seize the advantage of the study to counsel students and teacher alike for a better attitude towards the study of English language.

Research Design

The research design is an ex-post – facto descriptive study focusing on the relationship between attitude and academic ability and achievement in English Language.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of this study comprised two thousand (2000) SSII students in all the fifteen (15) secondary schools in Ikorodu North and South Local Governments in Lagos State. Out of fifteen (15) secondary schools that constitute the target population of the study, four hundred SSII students were selected through random sampling.

Research Instruments

The following Research Instruments were used

- (i) Student's Academic Ability Test (SAAT)
- (ii) Students' Attitude to English Language Questionnaire (SATELQ)
- (iii) Existing Annual Scores in English Language.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

After drawing out the Student's Attitude to English Language Questionnaire, Chrombac Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the scale and a coefficient of 81 was obtained. Students' Academic Ability Test was adapted from Fakeye (2001) and was revalidated using test-retest method and a co-efficient of 78 was obtained.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher visited each of the five (5)

secondary schools, obtained permission from the principals and then proceeded to administer the questionnaires with the assistance of the English teachers in the schools.

In all, four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered and collected after one week (in some cases). The annual scores of the four hundred (400) students in English language were collected for the study. Students Academic Ability Test was administered with a view to categorizing them into High, Medium and Low Academic Ability Groups.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method of data analysis used is descriptive statistics, which involves the use of frequency count and percentages and inferential statistics such as correctional Analysis and t-test.

RESULTS

Research Question1: Is there any significant relationship between

- (a) Attitude of the students and their achievement in English Language
- (b) Academic ability of the students and their achievement in English language.

Table 2 reveals that there is a positive relationship between students attitude and their English language achievement but that the relationship is too low and not significant ($r = 0.025$, $p > .05$). It also shows that there is positive relationship between academic ability and English achievement of the students but the relationship is also low and not significant ($r = 0.135$, $p > .05$).

Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference in

- (a) Attitude of male and female students toward English language?
- (b) Academic ability of male and female student

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students towards English language. (t -value = 0.620, degree of freedom = 398, $p > .05$). It also show that there is significant difference in the

Table 2: Summary of person product – moment correlation

Variables	N	Mean	Std. D	r	p	Remark
Students' attitude	400	65.61	6.24			
English Language Achievement	400	60.03	11.31	0.025	0.729	Positive but Not Sig.
Academic Ability	400	60.03	11.31	0.135	.056	Positive but Not Sig.
English Language Achievement	400	59.05	13.51			

Table 3: Summary of t-test

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. D</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Remark</i>
<i>Students Attitude</i>							
Male	208	65.69	5.56				
Female	192	65.17	6.11	0.62	398	0.536	NS
<i>Academic Ability</i>							
Male	208	62.08	13.51				
Female	192	56.15	12.76	3.165	398	0.002	Significant

Table 4: Summary of t-test

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. D</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Remark</i>
<i>English Language Achievement</i>							
Male	208	59.89	12.75				
Female	192	60.39	9.73	-0.305	398	0.761	Not Significant

academic ability of male and female students. (t-value = 3.165, degree of freedom = 398; $p > .05$). Going by the mean scores of both male and female, male has a better ability (62.08) compared to female (56.15).

Research Question 3: Is there any significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in English language?

Table 4 reveals that the difference between male and female students' achievements in English language (i.e. 0.5) is not significant. (t-value 0.305, degree of freedom is 398 and $p > .05$).

Research Question 4: What is the attitude of the students towards English language?

Table 5 (i) contained the positively worded items and it shows that the students strongly agreed with item no. 17, 21, 23 and 24 ($X = 4$), they agreed with item no. 3, 4, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22 and 25 ($X = 3$) and they disagreed with item 6. The weighted average is 3.10, which is above the mid score of 4 (if 2). Therefore it can be inferred that the students have average positive attitude to English language.

Table 5(ii) which contains the negatively worded items confirms the average positive attitude of the students by given the weighted mean of the table to be 2.11. The results showed that there was a positive relationship between students' Attitude and their Achievement in English language ($r = 0.025$, $P > .05$). The results of this study therefore support other findings that performance in second language learning depends on students' attitude (King 1981; Adelabu 1998; Olaboopo 1999; Fakeye 2002; Adeosun 2004; Anoma 2005). However, Brumfit (1994). Cook (1991) observed that there was no positive relationship between attitudinal factors and proficiency in French; rather they declared

that attitude is age-dependent. It is however clear from the results of this study that attitude is not gender-related as there was no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students ($t = 0.620$, $df = 398$, $P > .05$). This finding disagrees with many studies on attitude, gender and language ability. Oyeyebi (1998), Fakeye (2002) identified higher attitude scores of female students in language learning as compared to their male counterparts.

The result further showed that there was significant difference in the academic ability of male and female students with male students having higher academic ability mean scores. ($t = 3.165$, $df = 398$, $P < .05$). However, the difference in the male and female academic ability did not bring about any significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in English language. This runs counter to some findings of earlier research in which academic ability has a direct influence on students' achievement in second language learning (Obemeata 1974; Bakare 1990; Long 1991; Lightbown 1993 cited in Fakeye 2002; Byrne 1993 cited in Anoma 2005). These scholars in their separate studies found that intelligence was highly related to performance in reading, dictation, and writing tasks but not on listening comprehension and oral tasks.

The results on academic ability also negate the findings of Stubb (2002) in which he said that children who score higher in test of academic ability perform better than those who score very low in English language learning. However, the facts that the research was conducted in Lagos State where majority of the students are from favourable home background may explain the absence of significant difference in their

Table 5 (i): Attitude of students to English language

S. No.	Statement (+vely worded)	4SA	3A	2D	1SD	Mean	Std.D
3	Our teacher is a master of the subject	104(13.0)	280 (35.0)	344 (43.0)	72(9.0)	2.52	.83
4.	The way our teacher teaches English is interesting	42(10.5)	174(43.5)	123(31.5)	58(14.5)	2.5	.87
6	I like taking part in debate at school.	60 (15.0)	90 (22.5)	170(42.5)	78(19.5)	2.32	.97
16	I need to have access to supplementary readers and magazines at home to improve the learning of English language	224 (56.0)	120(30.0)	34(8.5)	18(4.5)	3.36	.89
17	My parents would appreciate it if I do well in English language examination.	346 (86.5)	48 (12.6)	2 (.5)	4(1.0)	3.84	.45
18.	I strive to do well in English because my parents always show interest in my performance in it.	262 (65.5)	98 (24.5)	20 (5.0)	14(3.5)	3.49	.86
19	My English language teacher's manner of speaking is worthy of emulation	110 (27.5)	150 (37.5)	66 (16.5)	62(15.5)	2.71	1.12
20	My elder brother and sisters often assist me at home	138 (34.5)	100(25.0)	92(23.0)	68 (17.0)	2.76	1.12
21	When ever I have difficulty in English language	288(72.0)	78(19.5)	12 (3.0)	22 (5.5)	3.58	.80
22.	Speaking good English will accord me high respect among my colleagues	166 (41.5)	122 (30.5)	68 (17.0)	44 (11.0)	3.03	1.02
23	When one is good in English language, he will do well in other subjects.	280 (70.0)	94(23.5)	16(4.0)	10 (2.5)	3.61	.69
	I want to do well in English because it guarantees good job and further educational advancement.						
24	The way my parents speak English excites me.	248 (62.0)	136 (34.0)	14(3.5)	2(.5)	3.58	.59
25	My parents buy English language textbooks for me and enroll me in coaching classes for better performance in English language.	138 (34.5)	154 (38.5)	74 (18.5)	34 (8.5)	2.99	.94
	Weighted Average				3.10		

Table 5 (ii)

S. No.	Statement (-vely worded)	4SD	3D	2A	1SA	Mean	Std.D
1	English language should not have been made compulsory in secondary school level.	40 (10.0)	28(7.0)	104(26.0)	224(56.0)	1.69	.99
2.	English language is too difficult to learn	2 (.5)	38 (9.5)	230 (57.5)	126 (31.5)	1.77	.65
5	I hate being in English language class	22 (5.5)	64 (16.0)	188(47.0)	126 (31.5)	1.96	.83
7	I don't like doing homework in English language	54 (13.5)	44 (11.0)	118(29.5)	180(45.0)	2.23	3.18
8.	I prefer reading textbooks in other subjects to English language	86 (21.5)	100(25.0)	108 (27.0)	106(26.5)	2.42	1.10
9	It does not matter the way English is taught, I am not interested.	20(5.0)	28 (7.0)	132 (33.0)	220 (55.0)	1.62	.82
10.	I do not like my English language teacher	50 (12.5)	112 (28.0)	140 (35.0)	92 (23.0)	2.27	1.00
11	I always find some other things to do in class whenever the teacher is teaching English	20 (5.0)	86 (21.5)	164 (41.0)	128(32.0)	1.99	.87
12.	My teacher forces one to speak in school	62(15.5)	60(15.0)	116(29.0)	162.(40.5)	2.0.6	1.09
13.	I do not like to speak English language outside the classroom	22(5.5)	24(6.0)	114 (28.5)	140 (60.0)	1.57	.84
14.	English language class is always boring.	88 (22.0)	118 (29.5)	142 (35.5)	50 (12.5)	2.76	2.29
15.	I don't bother to go to my teacher for further explanation after English lesson	138 (34.5)	156 (39.0)	78 (19.5)	28 (7.0)	3.01	.91
	Weighted Average			2.11			

achievement in English. This finds corroboration in Adelabu (1998) in which she declares that students from favourable home background even if low in academic ability often do well in achievement in English language.

Based on the summary of findings above, this study has the following recommendations for English language teaching and learning. Considering the central role of attitude in English language learning, parents should endeavour to create conducive environment for their children to improve their attitudes towards the subject. In addition, the English language teachers should evolve effective teaching and learning strategies for English language to develop students positive attitude to the subject. Teacher's personality goes a long way in influencing students' attitude towards English language. Further more, school administrations should encourage regular attendance at seminars/workshops for English Language teachers to keep them abreast of innovations in the teaching of the subject in a way that students' attitude can be improved. Government should provide basic facilities in schools such as library facilities. This will further give the students opportunities to develop positive attitudes to English. Finally, teachers of English should consider the varying academic ability of learners when planning their instructional programmes.

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