

EFFECTS OF LEARNER AUTONOMY AMONG SS I STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the effect of learner autonomy among senior secondary one student in reading comprehension in English Language in Ankpa Local Government Kogi State, Nigeria. The study utilized a quasi-experimental design and used the non-randomized non-equivalent pre-test and post-test treatment and control groups of 200 students. Data was collected from four intact classes purposively selected secondary schools in Ankpa, Kogi State, Nigeria. The instrument was formulated by the research which was based on reading comprehension achievement Test (RCAT). The instruments were properly validated and tested for reliability by three experts in English Department, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa. The reliability was determined using test and re-test method while Cronbach alpha was used to analyze the result. Descriptive statistics standard deviation and mean gain scores were used to answer the three (3) research questions while Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the corresponding null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study reveal that there was a significant difference in the achievement of male and female students. The study also revealed that there is a significant difference in the instructional effect of those in the urban from those in the rural. The finding of the study revealed that learner autonomy resulted in improvement of students' achievement in reading comprehension more. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others that learner's autonomy be adopted by English Language students, English teachers and other education stakeholders.

Keywords: Learner's Autonomy, Reading Achievement and Students

A unique characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other animals is the ability to use language in the dynamic form-speech. Every human society possesses a language which is used in exchange of views about the universe. English is a language and one of the most prominent languages in Nigeria. English as a matter of history descended from Anglo-Saxon, which developed fully in England in the fifteenth century into early modern English (Hammarstrom, et al, 2017). However, the English Language which was bequeathed to Nigeria as a legal inheritance from the colonial masters plays a central role in this globalization and it has become the de-facto language of choice for national and international communication among various people of the earth. It is the most frequently used language in the judiciary, media and commerce.

The English language is a crucial element in the field of education. It is the language of teaching and learning of other subjects that are written in other languages are still translated in English language for maximum comprehension. In this regard, Majah and Offoma (2010) expressed that English language is a major vehicle for education in Nigeria. It is the medium of instruction in schools and has been made a compulsory subject from upper primary down to tertiary institutions (FRN, 2013). It is one of the core subjects that one must pass at credit level before one can gain admission into higher level of education.

However, there are different methods and approaches used in teaching and learning of this subject English Language (Oluyomi, 2015). These methods are teacher-centered-in nature. The characteristic of teacher-centered-method limits itself to a specified content as proposed by the teacher or instructor. The learning processes are always on one-way-method of teaching and going. This approach of teaching is for the learner to merely master limited set of knowledge by memorizing content or applying rehearse formulae without addressing the actual process-skills as needed or as it should be given unto the learner. Meanwhile, the objectives of these methods of teaching and learning especially in the aspect of autonomous reading and comprehension achievement in English Language at the secondary schools seem not to be achieved. Secondary school students are hardly found initiating self-reading but waiting for the teacher to come and read for them while they (students) merely listen even some will be sleeping in the process. In support of the researcher observation, Oluyomi (2015) stated that secondary school students demonstrate narrow range of reading ability in English Language especially in their external examinations.

The problem of students inability to read comprehensively, meaningfully and thoughtfully is mostly noticeable among the SS I students that one is thinking they should have matured enough to be able to take the challenge of self-initiative reading comprehension such as learner autonomy without the teacher's assistance. The researcher guess there is a problem and proposed to carry out a study on the effect of learner autonomy on reading comprehension among SS1 students in Ankpa Local Government Headquarter of Igala land in Kogi State. In this local government, there are 10 government secondary schools located at different angles of the area. It is assumed

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that low achievement of students in their external examinations is as a result of students not cultivating the idea of reading without aid of the teacher. Nevertheless, when one considers the level of student failure in English language external examinations especially West Africa Examination Certificate (WAEC) it is clear that there is an urgent need to search for an interesting learning method among students that may curb this failure. Below is a table showing the percentages performance of students that sat for West Africa Examination Certificate Between 2014 - 2019.

Table 1: Total Percentages of Performance of Candidates that Failed WAEC 2014 – 2019

| | |
|------|---|
| 2014 | West African Examination Certificate: More than 70% of candidates who sat for Nov/Dec, 2014 failed to make five credits in English Language (Vanguard, 2020, Para. 2) |
| 2015 | West African Examination Certificate: 70.67% candidates that sat for Nov/Dec, 2015 failed to obtain credit in English Language (Vanguard, 2020, Para. 2) |
| 2016 | West African Examination Certificate: About 61.32% failed English Language in WAEC, 2016 (Lagos Book Club, 2016) |
| 2017 | West African Examination (WAEC): 50.02 percent failed to obtain credits in English Language in the year 2017 (Lagos Book Club, 2017). |
| 2018 | West African Examination Certificate (WAEC) Release Results: There was a record of mass failure in 2018. 83% of candidates who sat for WAEC failed to obtain credit in English Language (Punch.ng, 2018). |
| 2019 | West African Examination Result for 2019: 50.75% candidates failed to obtain credit in English Language in the year (waecdirect.org, 2019) |

The above result shows that for the past six years precisely 2014 – 2019 candidates' average scores have been under-sixty percent (60%). These observations were in line with Joelnkata (2016) who stated that the rate at which students and candidates of competitive examinations fail English Language Examination in Nigeria and other West African is alarming. Joelnkata affirms that the reason for this is that there are many people who believe they have what it takes to pass English language examination at whatever level, yet they end up failing woefully. Some even possess an average spoken language skill but exhibited low reading comprehension skill in English,

and fail in reading comprehension test especially what the contemporary syllabus refers to as continuous reading skills (Vanguardngr.com, 2016/08).

However, the paramount teaching method used in the teaching of reading comprehension is English language among senior secondary 1 students is still the audio lingual method which according to Agada (2008) is a method of teaching that establishes the primacy of speech at the expense of reading activities. Audio lingual method does not encourage learner autonomy as a learning method; the bulk of classroom teaching activity is done by the teacher while the students watch which reduced them to mere spectators. Hence, audio-lingual method of teaching is being contrasted with learner autonomy in this study to see if learner autonomy will be able to curb failure among students especially in WAEC.

Literature Review

Learner autonomy was first coined in 1981 by Henri Holec (Father of learner autonomy). Many definitions have since been given to the term depending on the writer. According to Henri Holec (1981), learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning independently. In the same vein, Agada (2008) added that in order to help learners assume greater control over their own learning, it is important to build them to become aware of and identify the strategies that they already use or could potentially use. The ability of a learner to take control of their own reading, either in the classroom or outside the classroom independently is recognized as learner autonomy (Macmillan.nd)

Learner autonomy, as stated by Allwright (1988) in Benson (2007) has long been associated with a drastic restructuring of language pedagogy, involving the dismissal of the traditional classroom and the beginning of completely new systems of work. The focus therefore on language teaching has shifted from the emphasis on methodology to emphasis on the learners.

As a matter of fact, autonomous learning does not exclude teachers' role in the classroom, teachers are supposed to better organize the class, guiding students to make practical learning or reading plan and objective, helping students evaluate their reading skills by giving immediate and appropriate feedback, creating conducive reading environment that could facilitates autonomous learning (Hua, 2001).

Empirical Studies on Autonomous learning

Empirical research on learner autonomy has been found to be positively related to better any learning achievement in overseas country. For instance, a study was carried out by Bin (2017), the study was on one-semester-long intervention study of peer assessment in a college English writing class. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of peer assessment on learning autonomy. Seventy English major sophomores (a second-year or undergraduate) from an independent college in China participated in the study students were randomly selected and divided into two groups 35 students each. Traditional teacher feedback was used in the control group while peer assessment

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learning autonomy was adopted for the experimental group. A questionnaire on LA was administered to both groups as the pre-test and the post-test. A number of ANCOVA analyses were run to measure the effect of peer assessment learning autonomy on students, the results indicated that peer assessment enhanced the students' learner autonomy. Peer assessment significantly reduced learners' dependence on the teacher and boosted the students' confidence in learning ability.

Another study was carried out by Mariana Stone in (2018) on the topic "The effect of autonomy-based instruction on motivation and academic performance". The study, which was informed by self-determination theory, examined the impact of an autonomy-based instructional intervention on the motivation and academic performance of America University Students 219 enrolled in an elementary Spanish course. This study utilized a quasi-experimental design with the experimental group receiving an autonomy-based instructional intervention while a comparison group receiving a business as usual course experience. Both the experimental and comparison group were exposed to the same curricular material, with the difference being that the experimental group was given the opportunity to apply autonomous decision-making to structuring their learning experience. The study examined three (3) research questions and three (3) hypotheses. Results showed improvement on both motivation and language performance. Neither autonomy nor motivation was related to improvements in students' language performance. Also in a study carried out by (Vickers & Ene, 2006) to investigate Chinese postgraduate students' autonomous English Learning (AEL) level and influencing factors, they discovered that learner autonomy has been a positively related to English learning achievement.

In summary, learning autonomy has been found to be positively related to English learning achievement based on the empirical studies investigated, with regard to the effects on Learner Autonomy but all these studies were carried out in outside Nigeria. There is the need to experiment it in Nigerian schools to see if it could be a learning strategy to huge academic success among students in their internal and external examinations

The learning theory underlying the use of learner autonomy approach is the humanistic theory. This theory emphasizes self-actualization and autonomous of student in learning and freedom of reading (Huitt, 2001). Humanistic theory is a theory that recognizes the learner as a whole person who has analytic ability to read understandably where the role of educator (teacher) is to facilitate feedback to the learner inform of outcome or result that evaluate students growth in autonomous learning responsibility (Fredrick, 2006). While the learning theory underlying the use of audio-lingual method of teaching is the Behavioural theory of stimulus-response which upholds that language, like much of human behaviour takes the form of repeated responses to similar stimuli (Alberto and Troutman, 2003).

Statement of the Problems

Since the problem of this study is the learner inability to achieve much in English language due to their inability to initiate self-reading in English language which probably causes failure in students External Examination specifically in their West Africa Examination Certificate (WAEC) is of interest to the researcher while the purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of learner autonomy on SS1 students' achievement in reading English Language in Ankpa local government area in Kogi State Nigeria. However, Achievement is one of the vital variables in the study. According to Alderson (2005) achievement is the ability to obtain set objectives successfully. Similarly, Oluyomi (2015) explains that achievement is what a reader has understood or gained at the end of a study or reading activity. Another vital variable considered important in this study is gender. Gender in this study is regarded as a cultural constraint which distinguishes the role, behaviour, mental and emotional characteristics between males and females developed by a society. In language learning especially reading comprehension, there has been controversial report on gender performance. Opinion differs on which gender achieves better than the other. Some people claim that male perform better than the female (Azikiwe, 2005), while others uphold that females achieve better than males (Offorma, 2005). Sex difference in the achievement learner autonomy is of interest in this study.

There are some gaps in the existing research on learner autonomy among students of English Language. First, despite many existing studies on learner autonomy there is still a limited amount of research carried out in Nigeria schools especially among secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. To fill the gap, much can be done on JSS3 and SS2 students since the present study is carried out on SS1 students in learner autonomy in reading comprehension, more research work can be done in the areas of writing and speaking skills. However, there are two research questions and two hypotheses formulated to guide this study; these are;

Research Question

- (1) What is the difference in the mean achievement score of SS1 students who learn reading comprehension using learner autonomy approach and audio-lingual method?
- (2) Is there any difference in the mean achievement score of male and female SS1 students when they learn reading comprehension through autonomy approach and those taught with audio-lingual method?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

- (1) There is no significant difference exists in the mean achievement scores of senior secondary one (SS1) who learnt reading comprehension through learner autonomy strategy and those who were taught with audio-lingual method.

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(2) There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female senior secondary one (SS1) when they learnt reading comprehension with learner autonomy and those that are taught with audio-lingual method.

Research Method

At the beginning of the experiment the researcher through the assistance of the regular English Language teachers in the sampled schools who had undergone two days research training administered the pre-test of the English Language Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (ELRCAT) to both the experimental and control groups. At the end of the experiment which lasted for four (4) weeks, a similar but re-shuffled (ELRCAT) was administered to the two groups as post-test. For each of the groups; data recorded separately scoring were effected for the both groups using marking scheme prepared by the researcher. Pre-test scores compared with the post-test to assess the effect of the treatment on learner autonomy on reading achievement in English language. The pre-test was used to determine the achievement level of the experimental and control groups before the treatment. The research questions were answered using the mean and standard deviation while the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance.

Result and Discussion

The results are arranged based on the research questions and hypotheses for each of generalization on each variable.

R/Q What difference exists in the mean achievement scores of SS 1 who learnt reading comprehension through learner autonomy and those who are taught with audio-lingual method?

Table 2: Mean Standard deviation of pretest and posttest achievement scores of secondary 1 school students who were taught reading comprehension using learner autonomy context and those taught with audio-lingual method (ALM)

| Variable | Pretest | | | Posttest | | |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------|------|-----------|-----|-----------|
| | N | \bar{X} | SD | \bar{X} | SD | Mean Gain |
| Learner Autonomy Approach | 100 | 15.0 | 3.46 | 37.8 | 3.4 | 22.80 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----|-------|
| | | 4 | 4 | 1 | | |
| Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) | 100 | 14.5 | 3.39 | 25.0 | 5.5 | 10.44 |
| | | 8 | | 2 | | 9 |

Results in Table 2 show that the experimental group taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) had a pretest academic achievement mean score of 15.04 with a standard deviation of 3.46 and a posttest academic achievement mean score of 37.84 with a standard deviation of 3.41. The difference between the pretest and posttest academic achievement mean score for the experimental group was 22.80. The control group taught reading comprehension using Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) had a pretest academic achievement mean score of 14.58 with a standard deviation of 3.39 and posttest academic achievements mean score of 25.02 with a standard deviation of 5.59. The difference between the pretest and posttest academic achievement mean score for control group was 10.44. However, for each of the groups, the posttest academic achievement means were greater than the pretest academic achievement means with the experimental group having the higher mean gain (22.80 > 10.44). This is an indication that instructional mode (i.e. Learner Autonomy approach (LA) or Audio-Lingual Method) have some effects on students’ academic achievement in reading comprehension.

Hyp/1 There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of senior secondary school students (SSI) taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) and those taught using the audio-lingual method (ALM).

Table 3: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of SS I Students’ Achievement in Reading Comprehension

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|---------|------|
| Corrected Model | 6404.478 ^a | 8 | 800.560 | 27.103 | .000 |
| Intercept | 6887.957 | 1 | 6887.957 | 233.193 | .000 |
| Pretest | 43.176 | 1 | 43.176 | 1.462 | .228 |
| Gender | 59.086 | 1 | 59.086 | 2.000 | .158 |
| Location | 299.840 | 1 | 299.840 | 10.151 | .003 |
| Method | 4778.804 | 1 | 4778.804 | | |

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| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----|--------|--------|-----|
| Error | 5169.082 | 175 | 29.538 | 161.78 | 9 |
| Total | 183289.000 | 200 | | 7 | .00 |
| Corrected Total | 11573 560 | 189 | | | 2 |
| | | | | | .00 |
| | | | | | 0 |

The result in Table 3 shows that with respect to the achievement mean scores SS I students taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) and those taught with audio-lingual method, an F-ratio of 161.787 was obtained with associated exact probability value of 0.00. Since the associated probability value (0.00) is less than 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis, this means that the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which stated that there will be no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of SS I students taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) and those taught with audio-lingual method is rejected. Inference drawn is that there is a significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught reading using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) and those taught with audio lingual method. This result shows that Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) resulted in an improvement of students' achievement in reading. Although both instructional mode Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) and audio-lingual method) resulted in an improvement of SS I students' scores, Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) had a higher mean gain.

R/Q 2What are the mean achievement scores of male and female senior secondary school students taught reading comprehension students Learner Autonomy?

Table 4: Mean and Standard deviation of pretest and posttest achievement scores of male and female secondary school 1 students' taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Approach?

| Variable | Gende r | Pretest | | | Posttest | | |
|------------------|------------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|--------------|
| | | N | \bar{X} | S D | \bar{X} | S D | Mean Gain |
| Learner Autonomy | Male | 46 | 14.0 3 | 3.3 7 | 36.7 0 | 3.4 3 | 22.67 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|----|------|-----|------|-----|-------|
| | Femal | 54 | 15.8 | 3.3 | 34.9 | 7.4 | 19.11 |
| | e | | 3 | 5 | 4 | 8 | |

Results in Table 5 show that the male group taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) had a pretest academic achievement mean score of 14.03 with a standard deviation of 3.37 and a posttest academic achievement mean score of 36.70 with a standard deviation of 3.43. The difference between the pretest and posttest academic achievement mean score for the male group was 22.67. The female group taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Approach had a pretest academic achievement mean score of 15.83 with a standard deviation of 3.35 and posttest academic achievements mean score of 34.94 with a standard deviation of 7.48. The difference between the pretest and posttest academic achievement mean score for female group was 19.11. However, for each of the groups, the posttest academic achievement means score were greater than the pretest academic achievement means score with the female group having higher mean gain (22.67 > 19.11). This is an indicative that may have some influence on the academic achievement mean score of students on reading comprehension when taught with learner autonomy approach.

Hyp/ 2 There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female senior secondary school students taught reading comprehension using learner autonomy approach.

Table 5: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of male and female SS I students' achievement in reading comprehension taught using audio lingual method

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig. |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|---------|------|
| Corrected Model | 71.739 ^a | 2 | 35.869 | .963 | .386 |
| Intercept | 5364.324 | 1 | 5364.324 | 144.092 | .000 |
| Pretest | 1.890 | 1 | 1.890 | .051 | .820 |
| Gender | 71.027 | 1 | 71.027 | 1.908 | .171 |
| Method | .000 | 0 | 37.229 | | |
| Gender * | .000 | 0 | | | |

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| | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----|
| method | 3313.337 | 89 |
| Error | 120681.000 | 100 |
| Total | 3385.076 | 97 |
| Corrected Total | | |

$\alpha = 0.05$

The result in Table 6 shows the effect of gender (male and female) on SS I students' achievement in reading comprehension using learner autonomy approach having an F-ratio of 1.91 which was obtained with associated probability value of 0.17. Since the associated probability value 0.17 is greater than 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis, this means that the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which stated that there will be no significant difference between the effect of gender (male and female) on students achievement in reading comprehension accepted. Inference drawn is that there is no significant difference between the effect of gender (male and female) on students achievement in reading comprehension. Although there was an improvement in male and female students' achievement in reading comprehension when taught learner autonomy approach but there is no significant difference between male and female academic achievement score. Therefore, any difference in the achievement mean score of male and female students in reading comprehension on the basis of learner autonomy approach may be due to chance.

Discussion

Based on the new outline of English Language teaching for students majoring in English Language in the Universities and Colleges in China, the aim of British and American literature is to train students' ability to read autonomously which they hold esteem. Hence, cultivating learner autonomy is very essential especially for SS1 students who are at the preparatory class for external examinations just as what Richard and Rodgers said, "the only man who is educated is the man who has learned and realized that no knowledge is secured and that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for learning security (Richard & Rodgers, 2001, p. 104). This is also in line with Smith, (2008) who stated that "autonomous reading enhances retention in no small measure, success is interest and comprehension achieved" p:395. In the same vein, Palfreyman and Smith, (2003) opined that when students feel ownership over their learning both in terms of what they learn and how they learn it they simply cover more. It is therefore for them to become self-reliant language learners who can continue learning effectively outside the classroom. Oluyomi (2015) added that engaging yourself

as a learner in extensive learning leads one into a more collaborative and focused classroom which will lead to better mastery of your learning objectives. However, the findings of the experiment conducted in Effect of Learner Autonomy among SS1 students reading comprehension achievement in English Language in Kogi State shows that the cultivation of learner autonomy has resulted in improvement of the students' academic achievement which is not in support of the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of SS I students taught reading comprehension using Learner Autonomy Context (LAC). Inference drawn is that there is a significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students taught reading using Learner Autonomy Context than those taught using Audio lingual method. This result shows that Learner Autonomy Context (LAC) resulted in an improvement of students' achievement in reading and it increases comprehension among the learners. Benson, 2007; Holec 1981, 1988; Hua, 2001 Palfreyman and Smith 2003, Richard and Rodgers 2001, Smith 2008; all fostering learners autonomy which enhances better learning coverage and what they are expected to do by their selves.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion from the study, the following recommendations are advanced: Learners both male and female be encouraged to key into learner autonomy, self-monitored learning. So many students are found lazy to initiate the responsibility of reading on their own. Such should be told the advantages in learner autonomy approach of learning especially the computer age where much has to be done to read and write by one's self. However, in the process of the experiment some students are found too slow to adapt to self-responsibility of learning. In the future study there is the need to strengthen supportive measure for fostering learner autonomy by equipping them with appropriate learning strategies beforehand. Let there be optimal studying environment for autonomous learning by meeting learners' academic or reading material needs that probably may enhance positive, efficient and effective classroom reading comprehension and out-of-class reading thus given more promotion to their reading comprehension achievement in English Language using learner autonomy approach.

To the curriculum planner, the use of learner autonomy should be incorporated into the curriculum of different levels of learning especially from senior secondary classes as it improves their overall achievement. In addition, teachers, parents, students and other education stakeholders should be encouraged in learners that any learning activities that will stimulate students' personal academic thinking, problem solving abilities especially one that involves the use of autonomous in learning the skills of language more importantly reading comprehension achievement be encouraged.

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