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Gender, Age and Locus of Control as Correlates of Remedial Learners' Attitude towards English Language

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Abstract

The study sought to explain remedial learners' attitude towards English language using three variables: gender, age and locus of control. Three properly validated instruments were used to collect data on the relevant variables from 385 remedial English learners randomly selected from 5 remedial education centers in Ibadan, Nigeria. Data analysis involved the use of multiple regression to explain the relationship between learners' attitude towards English and the 3 independent variables. The results showed that gender, age and locus of control, when acting together, predict attitude and at the individual level of contribution, only one variable– locus of control was significantly predictive of attitude towards English language. These findings have far-reaching implications for adult and non-formal education practitioners and other stakeholders interested in improving the lots of several learners out there, in English language.

Keywords: Gender, age, locus of control, remedial learners, attitude towards English

Introduction

The importance of English language in Nigeria's socio-political, economic and educational life is sine-qua-non. This importance is indicated by the fact that English is still the lifeblood of the whole educational system (Adelusi,

1983), from the upper primary through secondary to post-secondary levels (National Policy on Education, 2004); it is Nigeria's window on the world (Adepoju, 1996) and the "gateway" to the outside world (Ayodele, 2001).

English has been both a subject of study and a medium of instruction for about a century in the nation's educational system. And when we consider the roles of English language in Nigeria, it is a truism that it is both a second language and the medium of instruction.

In spite of this enviable status of the English language in Nigeria, performance of learners in the subject has been nothing to write home about. Only a few learners have acquired proficiency in English; many have not always passed English language at the ordinary level which is the recognized minimum level of attainment in the country and the level of proficiency in English is still below expectations even, among a large percentage of those who have passed the required ordinary level examinations in the language.

It is known that interest in and achievement in English language has continued to decline in the country (Adepoju, 2004; 2009; Ayodele, 2001; Adegbile, 2002; Kolawole, 2003; Fakeye, 2006). Adolescents and young people who constitute the bulk of the learners patronizing the remedial education centers, are likely to have some bias which shapes their attitude towards English because some of them have completed the three-year senior secondary education without a credit pass in the ordinary level English language (which is the acceptable standard of proficiency); some others have attempted the ordinary level English language examination for a number of periods without achieving the required level of success and yet, many more have been out of the formal school system and unable to access post-secondary education for a period ranging from two to five years or more as a result of deficiency in English. More so, a reasonable number of them in the programme are into full-time or part-time employment in order to sustain self and/or family. They are under stress and many of them feel frustrated as a result of one or a combination of some of the above situations. Their attitude to the language is thus, affected or influenced by these experiences.

Attitude towards a subject greatly influences achievement in that subject (Okpala, 1985; Adepoju, 2004). English learning in Nigeria is associated with the problem of learners poor attitude towards the language which invariably, influences achievement (Ayodele, 2001). In fact, attitude towards

a subject, noted Emina (1986), is the very basis of cognitive development and motivation as well as several other positive correlates of achievement.

In recent times, language educators have become increasingly interested in the problem of learners attitude towards English language (Adegbile, 1997; Ayodele, 1981; 2001; Adepoju, 2004). Certain demographic variables such as age, marital status and gender were found to be related to attitude (Ayodele, 1981; Adepoju, 2004). In other words, those factors make up learners' attitude. In a nutshell, the above presumes that a person's attitude is determined by the interaction between his or her personal characteristics and environmental factors.

Locus of control is a personality variable that has to do with the disposition to perceive one's reinforcement as contingent on one's own efforts or on some other factors beyond one's control. Locus of control personality refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events affecting them (Rotter, 1966). Individual who have an internal locus of control (intenalisers or internals), believe that the events in their lives are generally the result of their own behaviour and actions. Individual who have an external locus of control (externalisers or externals), on the other hand, believe that events in their lives are generally determined by chance, fate or other people (Sunbul, 2003).

Even though some studies (Ogunkola, 2000; Olaleye, 2004) have explored the relationship between locus of control and achievement, they are lacking on how locus of control is related to attitude. Some literature (Okpala, 1985; Olaleye, 2004; Ifamuyiwa, 2006), indicates that locus of control is a critical psychological attribute affecting learners perceptions and attitudes, yet, there is little evidence that investigations have been carried out in Nigeria to establish the relationship between some personal and psycho-social variables on the one hand, and learners attitude towards English language on the other hand.

The foregoing therefore, emphasize the need to bring into focus, the present study which examined how remedial programme learners attitude towards English is related to some demographic characteristics such as gender and age and the different aspects of locus of control. The concern of the present study therefore, was to provide answers to these questions:

- i. what is the composite effect of gender, age and locus of control on learners' attitude towards English?
- ii. what is the relative contributions of each of the variables to learners' attitude towards English?

Research Methodology

Participants were 385 remedial English learners randomly selected from 5 continuing education centres in Ibadan city, Nigeria. Of the 385 respondents, 178(46.2%) were male and 207(53.8%), were females. The age range of the sample was 17 to 26 years with a mean age of 19.6 years. 29 (7.53%) were reported to have taken the ordinary level English language examinations once; 81 (21.04%) have had the examination twice and 275 (71.43%) have attempted it three times or more.

Data for the study was collected using 3 well validated instruments viz:

- i. **Learners Background Questionnaire (LBQ).**

LBQ was developed by the researcher to gather information on the personal, social and economic backgrounds of the respondents. It is a 15-item instrument drawn on a 4-point scale and divided into three sections viz A, B and C.

Section A contains items on the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age, sex, etc. Section B contains items that provide information on economic background of the learners such as parents' level of literacy, occupation, income, type of accommodation, etc. Section C on the other hand, sought information on some social constructs such as number of in the family, number of siblings, etc.

Learners Background Questionnaire was peer reviewed after which it was pre-tested on 50 remedial English learners from the University of Ibadan Remedial Education Programme and was found to be highly reliable (Cronbach alpha ≥ 0.78).

- ii. **Internal-External Locus of Control Scale:**

This was adapted from Rotter (1966). The I-E locus of control was used to measure the extent to which English learners had an internal or external locus of control. It consists of 29 forced-choice items of which 23 are keyed and 6 are fillers. Each pair contains one internal statement and one external

statement and subjects make dichotomous choice between the two alternatives.

Rotter (1966) reported test-retest reliability estimates range of 0.70 to 0.80 for I-E locus of control scale. For the purpose of this study, I-E locus of control scale was revalidated and this produced a Cronbach alpha value of 0.71.

iii. **Attitude Towards English Scale (ATES):**

ATES is a 15-item instrument placed on a four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree and respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement or otherwise to the items. ATES was pre-tested on 50 remedial English learners from the University of Ibadan Remedial Education Programme and this produced an estimate of construct validity and internal consistency reliability of 0.91 (Cronbach alpha).

Results

To determine the composite effects of gender, age and locus of control (as independent variables) on attitude towards English (as dependent variable), a stepwise multiple regression analysis procedure was employed.

Table I: Summary of Regression Analysis

Multiple R = 0.217

R-square = 0.026

Adjusted R square = 0.020

Standard error of the estimate = 1.4903

From table I, one can see that the three independent variables namely gender, age and locus of control accounted for 2.6% of the adjusted variance in attitude to English with a multiple R of .217 ($f=2.056$; $p<.05$).

To determine the relative contributions of each of the independent variables to learners attitude towards English, a stepwise multiple regression was applied (see table II). Only variable– 3 locus of control was revealed to have significantly contributed to attitude towards English through the regression analysis. The values of the standardized regression weights associated with these variables indicate that variable 3 (locus of control) is the most potent and significant contributor to the prediction ($\beta=-.111$); $p<.05$). Other independent variables (such as gender and age) were not revealed to be

significant contributors to the prediction of attitude through the regression analysis.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to determine those factors that determines remedial English learners attitude towards English language. The results as found in table I showed the composite effects of the three variables – gender, age and locus of control on attitude towards English language. The observed F-ratio is significant at the 0.05 level of significance. A further look at the table showed the values of the coefficient of multiple regression of 0.217 and multiple R square of 0.026. The implication of this is that the variable account for about 2.6% of the total variance in learners attitude towards English language.

Concerning the relative contributions of each of the variables to the prediction, the value of t-ratio associated with each of the variables as found in table II, shows that only locus of control made significant contribution to the criterion variable (that is, attitude towards English language). This research finding supports Odinko and Adeyemo (1999) arguments that a student's belief that his success and failure in English language are attributed to internal or external causes (the students locus of control), affects his level of persistence to achieve with respect to future teaching-learning assessment tasks.

It was found in this study that gender made no significant contribution towards the prediction of learners' attitude towards English language. This finding supports the studies of Lawani, (2004) and Adepoju (2004), which also failed to find significant relationship between gender and attitude towards English language. The lacking of gender differential in attitude towards English could be due to the homogenous nature of the youth culture and equal expectation for boys and girls in the Nigerian society.

On the influence of age on attitude, the results obtained showed that age made no significant contribution. This therefore, suggests that the age of a learner is not necessarily the main determinant of his/her attitude towards English language. This finding supports the position of Lawani (2004) who in her study reported that age did not make a significant contribution to attitude to and/or achievement in English language.

Conclusion

The findings from this study has empirical basis for the use of gender, age and locus of control as a predictor set in studying remedial learners attitude towards English language and that the use of gender and age as part of the predictor set, need to be done with caution and/or reconsidered.

Since it has been well noted that attitude towards a subject greatly influences achievement in that subject (Okpala, 1985) and that attitude is the very basis of cognitive development and motivation as well as several other correlates of achievement (Emina, 1986); the need to understand the variables which predicts learners attitude towards English language therefore, becomes more relevant.

By implication, instructors, organizers and administrators should facilitate the development of positive/favourable attitude towards English language by learners as this could make learners become strongly motivated to strive and achieve a sense of competence and psychological success in their language skills. However, their efforts may become frustrated when remedial English classes are handled by inexperienced or incompetent instructors (such as when graduates of some other disciplines are allowed to teach English language to remedial classes).

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