

Effects of Gender and School Location on the Ekiti State Secondary Schools Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension in English Language

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the effects of gender and school location on the Ekiti State secondary school students achievement in reading comprehension in English language. The study adopted pre-test, post-test and control quasi-experimental research using two experimental groups and one control group. The sample for the study comprised 270 Senior Secondary class two students (SSSII) selected from nine public senior secondary schools across the three senatorial district of the State using multi-stage sampling procedure that incorporated stratified random sampling and purposive sampling (with sex and location of school as stratification variables). The selected schools were assigned into three major groups, with each group made up of three schools of 30 students per school (two experimental groups and one control group). The instruments adapted for the study were: Morphological Production Task on Students' Academic Ability ($r = 0.74$), Morphological Analysis Task of Students' Academic Ability ($r = 0.83$) and Achievement Test in Comprehension (0.75). Experimental group 1 and 2 were taught with (Problem-Solving and Eclectic methods) with Morphological Instructional Packages respectively; while Conventional Teaching Method Guide was used by the research assistants to teach the control group. Data collected were analysed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Analysis of Covariance, (ANCOVA), Scheffe post-hoc and Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA). The study showed that there was no significant difference in the achievement of males and females between the experimental and control group. The study found that students in urban schools performed better than the rural schools in reading comprehension, inferring word meanings between the experimental and control groups. Based on the research findings, it was recommended that rural schools should be improved upon in terms of social facilities that could aid teaching. Also, students should be encouraged to read wide irrespective of school location and gender.

Keywords: Morphological Instructional Packages, Inferring Word Meanings, Reading Comprehension, Gender, School Location.

Introduction

The importance of English language in the economic, political, social, religious and educational activities cannot be sidelined. Any attempt to sideline language will mean that the curriculum will not be well implemented. Therefore, language remains a strong factor not only in the implementation of curriculum but in human interactions. English language in Nigeria has become the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much internal as well as external communication (Akindele and Adegbite, 2000). As a result of diverse roles assigned to English language in Nigeria, it becomes expedient for any Nigerian that wants to be relevant to the social, economic and political environment to reach appreciable competence level in reading comprehension. In a report on the examinations conducted in May/June by the West African Examinations Council 'between' 2004–2012, the data from Ekiti State Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Planning Statistics and Research Department showed that the performance of secondary school students in English language is seriously deteriorating except in 2011 when the State recorded 73% of distinction or credit in SSCE. The failure rate fluctuated between 15% and 51%. These poor results have made it difficult for many students to gain admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary to revive the deteriorating effect of reading comprehension skills among secondary school students.

The implication of the above data showed that, most of the candidates who sat for the Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE) will not be able to proceed to tertiary institutions because of their failure in English language. The failure recorded in English language at Senior Secondary Certificate Examination level is serious on the learners. Since these candidates need to pass English language at credit level to secure admission, their failure in the subject is a stumbling block to higher education. This is a pointer to the fact that the learners need to be helped and taught by highly competent teachers of English language (Oyinloye, 2005). The poor results could be traced to students' inability to "read with adequate comprehension" (Ogenyi, 2014). Thus, reading comprehension needs to be given the urgency it deserves.

Reading comprehension is at the central or core of language learning and acquisition, which forms the educational development in any society. Reading comprehension according to the Rand Reading Study Group (2002) is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. From the above definition, one could deduce that:

1. meaning is at the centre of the reading process
2. reading is an active and participatory process rather than passive process because the meaning of a text will not simply manifest without the reader being actively involved.
3. reading is a creative process. The reader has to recreate the meaning that the writer has already created. According to Arua (2009) the writer is the encoder and the reader of the meaning of the same meaning.
4. reading deals exclusively with written language. This enables a reader to return many times to a particular text.

The importance of reading comprehension cannot be overemphasized on learners/teachers' especially in the modern educational system where learning/teaching depend largely upon learner'/teachers' ability to interpret the printed text accurately and fully, respectively.

The ultimate of all teachers is to provide equal opportunities for every student (boy or girl) in the classroom (Ofodu and Lawal 2010). Nevertheless, research evidences and experiences have shown that gender is a significant factor in determining the performance of students in learning tasks. Research findings have been inconclusive as to whether boys (male) achieve higher than girls (females). Jiboku (1991) reported that female subjects performed better than their male counterparts in reading Comprehension. To corroborate his finding he asserted that females have left cerebrum; that the sphere that deals with verbal skill and it is more developed, while males have the right cerebrum sphere that deals with mathematical reasoning and spatial relationship. Available literature showed in some cases that boys are superior to girls and vice-versa. Nonetheless, Heller & Parsons as cited by Osalusi (2009) disputed this difference by finding no difference in the feedback given to boys and girls. Mura (1995) remarked that males and females have different ways of learning and that they achieve better when they are taught separately while Fennema (1996) asserted that in a co-educational classroom setting, boys receive more attention than do girls.

Hyde (1990) found minor gender differences in cognitive ability but did find moderate differences on one aspect of spatial ability. Salami (2001) found out that there was no significant difference between the male and female students' achievements in Economics. Adeosun (2002) found out that there was no significant difference in achievement score between male and female while conducting studies on the effect of multimedia package and students achievement in Social Studies.

Ismali (2009) found out that there were gender differences in academic achievement of students enrolled in pre- service ELT (English Language Teaching) teacher training department. He reported that girls have more efficient meta-cognitive disposition than their male peers.

Khwaileh and Zaza (2011) observed that males and females deal with complex and difficult task of life inside and outside the house, and handle relative easy and less demanding tasks or things at home. This assertion was at variance with Owuamanam and Babatunde (2007) submission in their study 'gender- role stereotypes and career choice of secondary school students in Ekiti State'. They observed that girls tend to go for courses that do not require more energy sapping and brain tasking such as home making while boys look for jobs in management, engineering, banking and other brain- tasking profession. Bilesanmi-Awoderu (2012) stated that the state-of-the-art information concerning gender and achievement was that researchers cannot put-paid to studies on this construct at least for now because of the inconsistencies in the available literature on the issue, thus, the inclusion of gender as a moderator variable in the study.

School location was also considered in the study of the achievement level of students in English language comprehension. Osalusi (2009) reported that there is the perception that rural dwellers are slow-witted hillbillies with little education and uninformed view about what goes on in the "real world"; whereas, those living in the urban areas are more exposed to modern technology which can aid learning than those in the rural areas. Howley (2003) reported that several studies found significant differences between students in rural and urban schools. It was also discovered that students living in rural areas of the United States exhibit lower levels of educational achievement and higher likelihood of dropping out of high school than do their counterparts in urban area (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001).

Based on the contradictions in the findings of scholars on the effect of schools location on students' achievement the researcher investigated the effect of school location on students' performance in reading comprehension in Ekiti State so as to find out what obtains in Ekiti State. Besides, a marking guide by WAEC was adopted to enable the researcher grade the achievement test in reading comprehension. Therefore, it was glaring that the teaching of reading comprehension must be improved in order to enhance the students' ability to do well and pass English language in examinations. The aim of this study was therefore; to investigate the effect of gender and school location on students in inferring word meanings in reading comprehension among secondary school students in Ekiti State.

Statement of the Problem.

Teaching reading comprehension in English language in the secondary schools has become a source of worries to parents, teachers and government owing the fact that the achievement of students in reading comprehension

would determine their altitude academically. This means that the changing needs of the society have placed enormous responsibilities on the learners and the educational system.

Therefore, reading comprehension skills are very needed to achieve this high level of scholarship expected of secondary school students. In order to assist the secondary school students, the problems of reading comprehension have to be confronted headlong. The study tried to determine the effect of gender and school location on the Ekiti State secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension in English language. These are problems and concerns that necessitated examining one effects of the gender and school location on the academic performance of secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the gender and school location on the academic achievement of SSS students in reading comprehension in Ekiti State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students between the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in inferring word meanings between the experimental and control groups.
3. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups.
4. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in inferring word meanings between experimental and control groups.

Methodology

The design used for the study is quasi – experimental of pre – test, post test control group design carried out in SSS in Ekiti State Nigeria. The population for the study was all SSS school class two students in Ekiti State. The subject were selected using multi – stage, stratified and purposive random sampling techniques owing the consideration of all the schools in the three Senatorial Districts of the state.

Two hundred and seventy English language students were selected for the study in the schools consisting of 132 males and 138 females. The experimental groups 1 & 2 were given treatment with eclectic and problem solving method, respectively; while the control group was only exposed to conventional method of teaching. Three instruments were adapted, validated and used for data collection for the study namely: Morphological Production Task on Students' Academic Ability ($r = 0.74$), Morphological Analysis Task of Students' Academic Ability ($r = 0.83$) and Achievement Test in Comprehension (0.75). Data collected were analysed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Analysis of Covariance, Scheffe post-hoc and Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA).

Results:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female between the experimental and control groups.

Means scores of male and female students in experimental and control groups were compared for statistical significance. Using Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: 2 x 3 ANCOVA of Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension by Gender and Treatment

Sources	SS	Df	MS	F-cal	P
Corrected model	14906.947	6	2484.491	77.731*	0.000
Covariate (pre-test)	3346.015	1	3346.015	104.686*	0.000
Sex	7.264	1	7.264	0.227	0.634
Groups	10681.273	2	5340.637	167.090*	0.000
Sex x Group	82.101	2	41.051	1.284	0.279
Corrected Total	8406.149	263	31.963		

$p > 0.05$

The result in table 1 showed that there was no significant difference in the achievement of male and female between the experimental and control groups ($F = 1.284$, $p > 0.05$). The null hypothesis is not rejected. Similarly, the main effect of gender on students' achievement was not statistically significant at 0.05 level ($F = 0.227$, $p > 0.05$). However, students' achievement in reading comprehension differ significantly by treatment ($F = 167.090$, $p < 0.05$). By implication, method was not sex biased.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in inferring word meanings between the experimental and control groups.

Achievement mean scores of male and female students in inferring word meaning in experimental and control groups were compared for statistical significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: 2 x 3 ANCOVA of Students' Achievement in Inferring Word Meanings by Gender and Treatment.

Sources	SS	Df	MS	F-cal	P
Corrected model	1254.464	6	209.077	53.059*	0.000
Covariate (pretest)	261.704	1	261.704	66.415*	0.000
Sex	2.532	1	2.532	0.642	0.424
Groups	908.868	2	454.434	115.326*	0.000
Sex * Group	3.653	2	1.826	0.463	0.630
Error	1036.336	263	3.940		
Corrected Total	2290.800	269			
Total	57246.000	270			

$p > 0.05$

Table 2 showed that there was no significant difference in the achievement of male and female students in inferring word meanings between the experimental and control groups $F = 0.463$, $p > 0.05$ level of significance. The null hypothesis was not rejected. The effect of gender on students' achievement in inferring word meanings is statistically significant at 0.05 level ($F = 115.326$, $p < 0.05$)

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups.

In order to test the hypothesis, achievement mean scores of students in rural and urban location in experimental and control groups were computed and subjected to statistical analysis using Analysis of Covariance, (ANCOVA) sat 0.05 level. The result is shown in table 3.

Table 3: 2 x 3 ANCOVA of Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension by School Location and Treatment

Sources	SS	Df	MS	F-cal	P
Corrected model	15345.947	5	3069.189	101.189*	0.000
Covariate (pretest)	3689.935	1	3689.935	122.270*	0.000
Location	263.638	1	263.638	8.736*	0.003
Group	9921.537	2	4960.769	164.380*	0.000
Location *Group	275.198	1	275.198	9.119*	0.003
Error	7967.149	264	30.179		
Converted Total	23313.096	269			
Total	329882.000	270			

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 revealed that there was a significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups ($F = 9.119$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected. Similarly, the main effect of location ($F = 8.736$, $p < 0.05$) and treatment ($F = 164.380$, $p < 0.05$) on students' achievement in reading comprehension was statistically significant at 0.05 level in each case.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in inferring word meaning between the experimental and control groups.

Mean scores of rural and urban students in inferring word meanings in experimental and control groups were compared for statistical significance using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level. The result is shown in table 4.

Table 4: 2 x 3 ANCOVA of Students' Achievement in Inferring Word Meanings by School Location and Treatment.

Sources	SS	Df	MS	F-cal	P
Corrected model	1309.701	5	261.940	70.484*	0.000
Covariate (pretest)	216.207	1	216.207	58.178*	0.000
Location	40.035	1	40.035	10.773*	0.001
Group	784.583	2	392.291	105.560*	0.000
Location * Group	22.174	1	22.147	5.959*	0.015
Error	981.099	264	3.716		
Converted Total	2290.800	269			
Total	57246.000	270			

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 showed that there was a significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban

areas in inferring word meaning between the experimental and control groups ($F = 5.959$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected. The main effect of location ($F = 10.773$, $p < 0.05$) and treatment ($F = 105.560$, $p < 0.05$) on students' achievement in inferring word meaning was statistically significant at 0.05 level in each case.

Discussion

The finding of this study showed that there was no significant difference in the achievement of male and female between the experimental and control groups. The finding of this study corroborated the findings of Heller and Parsons (1981), Salami (2001), Adeosun (2002) and Akinwumi (2010) that male and female students performed equally academically. However, the finding was at variance with the findings of Ayelaagbe (2000) and Ofodu (2010) that female students have an edge over their male counterparts in skills of oral communication and reading comprehension respectively. Also, Ismaili's (2009) finding was in support of Ayelaagbe (2000) that there was gender difference in academic achievement of students enrolled in pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher training development. According to him, girls have more efficient meta-cognitive disposition than their male peer.

Moreover, the study showed that the male students did not perform better than the female students in inferring word meanings in reading comprehension. This finding was consistent with Lawal (1991) that no significant difference existed in reading performance of male and female pupils in primary schools. However, Ofodu (2010) reported that sex has significant influence in the reading interest of students.

Moreover, the study revealed that students from urban schools performed better than those from rural schools. This corroborated the findings of Jahun (1989) and Ogunleye (2002) and Ofodu (2010) that students from urban schools performed significantly better than those from rural schools probably because of their exposure to better facilities, better staffed, good study habits, as well as better learning environment. The finding of this study ran contrary to Kolawole and Popoola (2011) submissions that the mean performance of students' from urban and rural locations in Mathematics is not statistically different.

The result showed that school location and treatment have significant effect on students' achievement in inferring word meanings statistically. However, this finding was at variance with the finding of Ajetunmobi (2014) that schools' location have no effect on either the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the method of instruction applied.

It was also noted that there was significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in inferring word meanings between the experimental and control. However, there was significant difference in the achievement of students in rural and urban areas in word formation between the experimental and control groups.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concluded that gender had no influence on the achievement of students in inferring word meanings in reading comprehension in English language. It was also revealed that school location had effect on the achievement of students' in reading comprehension and in inferring word meanings especially in urban school.

In view of the implications of the findings for reading comprehension in English language, it was recommended that teaching facilities that can aid teaching and learning in rural schools should be improved like their counterparts in the urban areas.

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