

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate home environment and gender of students as predictors of English Language achievement in Federal Capital Territory. Five research questions and six null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was ex post-facto. The sample consisted of 434 SS2 students from ten sampled Senior Secondary schools out of the 52 Senior Secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory. Purposive random sampling technique was adopted to sample co-educational schools intended to take care of gender. Demographic questionnaire and FCT Unified Promotion Examination were used to collect data which was analysed using mean, standard deviation, Multiple Regression, ANOVA and t-test statistical tools. The total variance that accounted for the combined influence of all the predictor variables (parental level of education, occupation, family size, family and gender of students) on students' English Language achievement is six percent and is statistically significant when the predictor variables were not considered separately. Only gender and family type contributed significantly to the prediction of students' English Language achievement. Based on the findings, it was recommended that since many parents may not be aware of the influence of home environmental factors on the academic achievement of their children, teachers, educationists and government should create awareness in parents on the importance of home environment on academic achievement; administrators through guidance and counselling services should help students who are victims; gender-stereotyping should be avoided by teachers and others and the importance of English Language to be emphasized.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language is an arbitrary system of symbols which enables man to communicate an infinite number and variety of messages, meanings, intentions, thoughts, requests and items of information. It is involved in thinking, memory and reasoning, problem-solving and planning. Indeed, language is involved in higher order mental processes. It is also a means of cultural and value transmission from one generation to the next or one country to the other (Uzoegwu, 2010). Language is a veritable tool of communication and it is an aspect of culture that is highly valued. It is used to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings and crucial for all aspects of learning. It is a vehicle of thought and the lack of command of a particular language makes thoughts inexpressible because only those who can understand any language can express themselves in that language (Onuigbo, 2009).

Language remains one of the most important characteristics of human behaviour and a uniquely human trait shared by individuals in different cultures. It is man's ability to use

language for purposes of communication that distinguishes him from other animals. In fact, man is the only animal that has evolved and perfected the use of language as a medium of expression. Of all the languages in the world, English Language seems the most popular. It is regarded as one of the major languages of African countries, so widespread in its use, and so essential a tool in everyday life. In many countries, including Nigeria, it is the official language, the language of administration of the law, and a medium of communication between people from different ethnic groups. It has been recognised as a powerful and an indispensable tool for national development and also the language of instruction at all levels in Nigerian schools. This is expressed in Mgbodile (2000), when he reported that in Nigeria's educational system, English Language enjoys an unchallenged position. According to him it became the first important subject in the school curriculum, and a pass in it was considered compulsory for the award of many of the country's certificates including the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), the London General Certificate in Education (GCE) and later the West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE). Even for admission into Nigeria's higher institutions, a good pass level in English was an important condition. For employment in the Nigeria labour market, a good knowledge was not only required but seen as an asset.

English Language is the medium of instruction for all school subjects from the primary school level to the university, in addition to being a compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria (Ajugo, 2007). In fact, a good mastery of English Language cannot be compromised especially in the Nigerian educational sector. This is because it has become the pivot on which the educational wheel rotates and as such proficiency in it will be a guarantor in making the learning of other subjects much easier. It therefore implies that students who are deficient in this language would not perform well in various other subjects.

In Nigeria, over the years, students' achievement in West African Senior School Examination has continued to be poor as shown by WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports. This is particularly worrying because it would be impossible for any candidate to do well in any other examination if English Language as a medium of expression is not mastered, a situation that does not and will never augur well for national development. Most of the students cannot advance to higher schools because of their inability to obtain a credit pass in this subject which is a prerequisite for admission into most courses in the tertiary institutions (Fakeye, 2002). Many of the students normally pass other subjects but English, whereas an excellent performance in these other subjects without a pass in English would amount to nothing. This low achievement is particularly evident in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. It is disheartening to note that students' achievement in English Language in Federal Capital Territory in public examinations such as WASSCE and NECO has been on the low side. In fact, the achievement has remained below 40% in the past six years. In 2005, it was 10.8%, 15.2% in 2006, 32% in 2007, 35% in 2008, 23% in 2009 and 17% in

2010. (Source: FCT Education Resource Centre, Measurement and Evaluation Unit).

In the Federal Capital Territory, a lot of efforts are made by the government to improve students' general academic achievement and English Language in particular. There is the provision of instructional materials, improved instructional strategies, workshops and seminars and recruitment of qualified teachers among many other factors. Most schools in the territory can actually boast of standard student-teacher ratio, language laboratory, equipped and standard library, conducive learning environment, exposure to language based co-curricular activities and even international oriented exchange programmes aimed at improving the learning of English as a second language. In spite of all these efforts, there are still evidences of low achievement in the subject and the situation has left all concerned worried.

Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is a territory with a peculiar environment. This is because it is a place where people from different cultural, economic, social, religious and educational backgrounds converge. There are also people with diverse orientation and attitude towards education and life generally. As the administrative headquarter of Nigeria, people from all corners of the country have access to, and reside in the territory in pursuit of their livelihood. Children from these homes make up the students of the schools in the territory.

The home environments of these children differ in many ways. Home environment refers to all the objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the child physically, emotionally and intellectually. Home environment varies in many aspects. Such variations can be seen in parental occupation, parental level of education, family size and type among many other variations. Students coming from different homes are affected differently by the variations academically, morally socially (Fakeye, 2010). Out of all the effects that the home environment may have on the child, academic achievement (intellectual) will be singled for this study.

In the FCT, there are different classes of occupations. These classes include political class, corporate executives, civil servants, public servants, clerics, big-time businessmen and women, traders, artisans and farmers. Some parents pay little or no attention to their children because they are so busy due to the nature of their occupation. This is usually at the detriment of the children who are left in the hands of house helps that automatically become part-time parents to the children. These children, in most cases may have enough money to spend due to the economic status of their parents. Unfortunately, these 'part-time' parents hardly ever play parental roles such as monitoring and supervising their academic activities. In the FCT, many adolescents are distracted from academics; especially those from wealthy homes. They spend their time in partying, jumping from one video shop to other and engage in some other activities that affect academic achievement negatively. This type of home environment makes little or no provision for family relationship and reduces parental

involvement which is an influential factor in students' achievement and motivation. This is because only students whose parents are closely involved in their school lives and who monitor their progress fare best in school (Pena, 2000).

On the other hand, some students come from home environments where the provision of basic needs of life is not quite easy. These children are expected to engage in hawking and doing menial jobs for the rich in the territory in order to raise money that will help in their education. Most times, they come to school psychologically depressed and physically weak, a condition that affects their attentiveness and participation in class activities.

In the FCT, students come from homes of different types. There are monogamous, polygamous and of a more recent trend single parent homes. These different home types influence children's learning at school differently. Today in the territory, more and more children are being born into single-parent household. Children from single-parent homes most often come to school with an air of incomplete parenting which sometimes inhibit their academic success (Simpson, 2008). Parents of monogamous family are usually more involved in their children's school affairs while those of polygamous may not. In most cases, students of the latter become victims of unhealthy rivalry that is prevalent in such a home. This is common with the cultures that permit polygamous homes and a significant percentage is found in FCT. Closely related to this is family size. While some homes are of many children, others are few. Whichever is the case, it determines the attention a child is given by the parents and the provision of school materials. The fewer the number of siblings a student has, the better for him or her. It is not erroneous therefore to say that students from large size families are most times beset with insufficient studying materials such as reading table and space, reading lamp when there is power outage at home etcetera. As a result, such students may come to school sometimes without doing their assignments.

It is also evident that in FCT, students have parents with different levels of education. Some of the parents are highly educated, some fairly while others do not have any formal education. These differences may affect the importance they attach to education. It may determine the level of involvement of parents in their children's school life. Some of the parents provide academically stimulating environment being educated themselves; and this, expectantly affects students' achievement. Pena (2000) observes that parental education and children's academic performance are significantly related to students' academic achievement. David (2001) also observes that students whose parents' level of education is not high do not have passion for academic achievement. This could be said to be as a result of lack of motivation from parents whose expectation from their children is not much. Ironically, there are some illiterate parents who motivate their children to soar high in academics so as to make up for their disadvantaged position. In most cases in FCT, well educated parents help their children in their academic activities such as helping out in assignment whereas the reverse is the case with parents whose level of education could

berated low, they will rather expect the children to engage in other non-academic activities, sometimes in petty business. The later seem not to know the value of education and are not bothered about what happens with their children's academic achievement.

There seems to be differences in students' achievement in the examinations conducted in different subjects in Federal Capital Territory. Though the students learn in the same environment, are taught with the same syllabus by the same teachers and exposed to the same school environmental factors yet their academic performances vary. In most cases, the female students seem to have records of higher achievement in English Language compared to their male counterparts. These differences have not really been accounted for convincingly though some have attributed it to the influence and treatment given to students by their teachers, peers, families and the society. These human factors who serve as agents of socialization tend to stereotype certain subjects to certain sex and this concept directly or indirectly influence the achievement of students in a particular subject. The question however still remains whether this is as a result of biologically inherent or socially based factors.

In the Federal Capital Territory, there has been a tendency for simplistic claims based on unexamined assumptions about gender differences. For instance, there is a generalisation that female students are better than their male counterparts in English Language. Contradictorily, while some advance that female students' achievement is higher than that of the males, some others report otherwise. In fact, there is no consensus on this issue but whatever the case may be, the relationship between students' gender and English Language achievement is not yet established. The researcher is therefore interested in finding out the extent gender of students can be used to predict English Language achievement in the Federal Capital Territory which may provide a foundation in stating the relationship of students' gender and their English Language achievement.

Generally, students' achievement in English Language in Federal Capital Territory in the recent past years has not been encouraging despite the fact that so many variables projected to be contributory to success are available in the territory. However, the study is not investigating the achievement rate; it is rather interested in some factors that could be used to predict students' achievement. It is therefore against this background that the researcher felt the need to determine the extent home environments and gender could predict students' achievement in English Language.

Statement of the Problem

Every year, analysis of students' achievement in English Language in the public examinations (WASSCE & NECO) is done by the examination bodies. The analysis is done at school by school level in Federal Capital Territory and kept both in the schools, with FCT Education Resource Centre, as well as at the Secondary Education Board for references. It is obvious from the records that students' achievement in English Language has been on the

lowside. In fact, the achievement trend has remained below 40% success in the past six years. This dismal achievement of students is particularly worrying because the examination serves as a foundation for the future of the youth.

Some school factors have been identified to promote better result in examinations. Factors such as availability of instructional materials, availability of teachers in quality and quantity, standard student-teacher ratio, language laboratory, conducive learning environment and improved instructional strategies are not lacking in Federal Capital Territory schools, yet students' achievement in English Language remains low. This implies that students' achievement is not only about what goes on in the school, rather it is also about what may be happening to them at home. The factors that characterise home environment are parents' level of education, occupation, family type and size, and they seem to influence academic achievement and as such could be used to predict students' achievement as projected by some researchers whereas to others, it is all about gender, which is either being a male or a female. Studies on achievement and the determining influencing factors abound but mostly on school environment, learning styles and teaching methods. However, either by chance or choice, much has not been done on home environment and gender of students with focus on English Language and particularly in Federal Capital Territory. Therefore, the statement of the problem put in a question form is to what extent can home environment and gender of students predict English Language achievement in Federal Capital Territory?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of home environment and gender of students on English Language achievement in Federal Capital Territory. Specifically, the study will determine the influence of the:

1. parental level of education on English Language achievement
2. occupation of parents on English Language achievement
3. family size on English Language achievement
4. family type on English Language achievement
5. gender on English Language achievement

Significance of the Study:

The findings of this study will be useful to the following; teachers of English Language and other subjects, students both in Federal Capital Territory and beyond, Guidance counsellors, school heads and administrators, secondary school management bodies, education commissions and ministries and finally parents and guardians of students.

This study is expected to avail teachers of English Language and other subjects the opportunity of the knowledge of diverse home environments, and how they can influence students' academic achievement. In the course of teaching and learning, they will know how to cope with some kind of attitudes by some students which could be as a result of their

home environment. It will also help them to adopt some instructional techniques that will accommodate the diverse dispositions from students as a result of diverse home environments. They will also realise that influencing students' choice of subjects should not be gender based especially English Language whose universality can never be over-emphasized. They should help students realise the place of English Language in their academic pursuit.

Students will know that their classes are made up of people from different home environments. Those who do not come from environments that will enhance their academic achievement will put more efforts on their own while others who are from enriched environment could assist their mates with some learning materials.

Schools guidance and counsellors will take advantage of the study which may serve as a guide in handling cases of truancy, bullying and restiveness et cetera among students. It will also help them to understand why some students do well in school while others do not. Psychologically, they will also know the kind of counselling services to give to a particular student depending on the home environment the student comes from.

The study is also expected to be of significance to examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO and others who will have explanation to the differences in students' achievement and as such will embark on symposium, advocacy and sensitization talk with the aim of highlighting the importance of providing students with home environments that will enhance their achievement.

The study is also expected to be of significance to school heads and administrators who are always interested in students' achievement in English Language because of its importance in the advancement of academic pursuit. They will take advantage of the study to always discuss with parents during Parents Teachers Association meeting on home environmental factors and their influence on their children's academic achievement.

Parents and guardians will not be left out in the significance of the study because they will get to know that students' academic achievement depends so much on home environment and as such will do everything within their reach to provide an enriched home environment.

At completion of the study, education parastatals will also benefit from it. It will help them to realise that students come from different home environments and as such will organise seminars and workshops of capacity building for teachers to equip themselves on how to accommodate students from different home environments.

Scope of the Study

The geographical scope is Federal Capital Territory where the researcher is teaching English Language in one of the Secondary schools while the content scope will cover all the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of English Language which is usually reflected in West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the influence of parental level of education on English Language achievement?
- What is the influence of parental occupation on English Language achievement?
- What is the influence of family size on English Language achievement?
- What is the influence of family type on English Language achievement?
- What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in English Language?

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested 0.05 level of probability.

H_{O1} There will be no significant influence of parental level of education on students' achievement in English language.

H_{O2} There will be no significant influence of parental occupation on students' achievement in English language.

H_{O3} There will be no significant influence of family size on students' achievement on English language.

H_{O4} There will be no significant influence of family type on students' achievement in English language.

H_{O5} There will be no significant influence of gender on students' achievement in English language.

H_{O6} Home environmental factors and gender of students will not significantly predict students' achievement in English Language.

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