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The Effect of Parental Supportiveness and Gender on English Language Achievement of Primary School Children in South-Eastern, Nigeria

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Abstract

English is a very important language in Nigeria today. It is a unifying language for the federation and also a major language of instruction in Nigerian schools. It is as well the official language of government business and the language of commerce and trade. Most school books and reading materials are written in English, but the standard of written and spoken English language by Nigerian pupils is very poor. It has been suspected that poor English language skill is a major contributor to the recurring mass failure of Nigerian students in public examinations. This study therefore investigated the effect of parental home-work supervision on English Language achievement of primary school children. The study is a quasi-experiment with pretest, post-test control group design. The experimental group adopted monitored parental home-work supervision while for the control group, the parent were neither trained nor monitored. The treatment lasted six weeks before the post test. English Language Achievement Test with reliability of 0.87 was used to measure learner achievement. The result

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showed that monitored parental home-work supervision was significantly better than the control (t_{-obt} = 3.40, $p \leq .05$). The effect of gender was not significant. Regular Parental home-work supervision was recommended.

Key Words: Parental Supportiveness, home-work, supervision, Gender, Achievement and English Language.

Introduction

It is worrisome that the standard of English language that is written and spoken by Nigerian school children falls far short of expectations. Many of them do not seem to realize that there are rules that govern the use of English language. It is a common observation that school pupils do not devote time to read their books or write meaningfully. When the pupils write on their own, they engage in copying other pupils' meaningless notes. Most primary school leavers carry their poor language skills to secondary and tertiary levels of education. The consequence of this has been the recurring mass failure of pupils in various public examinations. The search for an appropriate intervention measure has occupied the attention of many researchers and educators for a long time. There is every need for scholars to continue to search for ideas, facts and methodologies that will help to improve the use of English language by young Nigerian children.

It is believed that teachers, scholars, researchers and the educational agencies should work together to find a remedy to redress the poor English language skills of most Nigerian pupils. The hope of the nation in finding appropriate solution to this language problem falls mainly on the teachers and researchers. The researchers must therefore carry out more impactful researches which must be disseminated for the teachers to implement in schools and colleges.

This intervention study is based a simple strategy in family education that is termed Parental Educational supportiveness. This strategy has been found to work in most school subjects in Europe and America (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), but has been apparently neglected by parents and educators in Nigeria. This experiment offers a small scale controlled trial of the strategy.

Review of Literature

Educational researchers in Nigeria have observed that for many years, secondary schools that present candidates for external examinations such as the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), the National Examination Council (NECO) and the, Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), obtain woeful results on yearly basis (Ayodele, 2001; Adeosun 2006, Udosen and Ekanem, 2012). They have identified the candidates' poor mastery of English language as responsible for their woeful performance in these examinations.

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Lack of essential language skills at the senior secondary level by Nigerian students, is believed to emanate from poor foundation work in English language at the primary school level. Falayajo (1997) has shown that Nigerian primary schools were at the "bottom rungs" of the UNICEF/UNESCO monitoring of learning achievement study, conducted for primary schools in 1997. A random analysis of common entrance examination performance for English language of primary school children from Oyo state Nigeria for the years 2002, 2003 and 2004 examinations reveal that 66% of the sample from 2002 had scores ranging from 0-39, 63% of the sample in 2003 and 45% of the 2004 sample were in the same score range of 0-39 out of a maximum score of 100 marks. In those three years, only an average of 13 percent of the samples scored between 60-100 percent. For this reason, Iroegbu (2006) considers the data as evidence of the poor performance of primary school leavers.

As transition from primary school to junior secondary school is automatic, it is not surprising to find that the language use of students in most secondary schools is poor.

Udosen and Ekanem (2012) have associated pupils' poor performance in English with their inability to read with understanding materials written in English language. Thus the authors have called for help to enable the school children improve on their reading skills. Some Other findings of Udosen and Ekanem (2012) include: the use of learner centeredness and feed-back mechanism as the instructional conditions that improved the student' use of English. A feed-back mechanism which involves teacher-student-parents participation such as parental supportiveness through homework supervision appears to hold some promise. This type of family education strategy is rarely practiced in Nigeria today because of the unsettled nature of most homes and schools today.

Parental supportiveness refers to an essential level of assistance and facilitation which parents provide for their children to encourage them achieve improved educational output. Such supports according to Iroegbu (2006) include supervision of homework, provision of enabling environment for private study and school books, enrolment for extra coaching classes, paying administrative fees. Parental supportiveness has been suspected to be related to children's successes in school (Opdenakker and Damme 2001). Children have been found to be favoured when their families or parents are interested in their school work and this encourages them to work harder (Bush, 2002). Akinbote (2003) pointed out that adequate involvement of parents and the community in school management and learning activities of children provide parents access to information and knowledge about their children's needs, interest and learning.

Parental involvement in the school learning of children in Nigeria is not common. About 40 percent of the adult population are illiterates and therefore have no

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significant contribution to their children's school learning. The literate adults are mostly traders, farmers, and middle level employees who spend most of the day attending to their businesses or those of their employers. Such people usually take up odd jobs in order to augment their poor income. As a result, they do not have time to supervise their children's home work. The elite such as bank managers, Ministers, Commissioners etc are too busy with their professional activities that they pay no attention to their children's home work support. Rather than supervise their children's home –work, they hire home tutors or other house-hold personnel to care for the various needs of their children. Such tutors are never faithful and cannot substitute for parents. Several cases of sexual abuse and child abductions and other social vices have often been committed by unreliable house helps and home tutors.

Hartas (2012, 2013) has found that parental involvement in children's home-work is a significant factor for improved educational achievement in the developed nations. This finding is in line with Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), a study that remains the most cited research on parental involvement. Hartas (2013) found that the extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status.

The findings of Hartas (2012 and 2013) and those of Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) may not apply to Nigeria for a couple of reasons: The first is 'that there is no recognized social class system in Nigeria. It is therefore difficult to classify parents or families into different social class levels because no systemic distinctions can be drawn in the social system in Nigeria; the second is that the norm in Nigeria is that the men have the responsibility of shouldering their children's educational costs. It is only among few members of the educated elite that the mothers may intervene in the children's education, if they so desire.

Kernan (2012) has similar findings with Desforges and Abouchaar (2003). One of these findings is that good parenting has a significant effect on children's achievement and adjustment. Another is that in the primary school, differences caused by different levels of parental involvement are much bigger than differences associated with variation in school quality. Kernan has observed that homework supervision in which parents support their children's learning has improved educational achievement of affected learners. The current researcher believes that Kernan's (2012) findings and observations need to be validated in the African setting especially Nigeria because no similar research work has been done in Nigeria.

Cripps and Zyromski (2010) have found that parental support for children's education tends to diminish as the children get older and move from primary to secondary school. These authors hold the view that the adolescent years are critical years for the children's intellectual development and as such, parental involvement in

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children's home- work should continue as the children grow older. The authors have further observed that cooperation between home and school optimizes children's development and promote consistency in learning. It is important to note that home-school factor which is promoted in western cultures is hardly present in the African educational setting. As a result many African school children have little learning to bring from home to school. Thus effective linkage between the family (home) and the school does not exist in Africa as it does in Western cultures.

The tendency in most Nigerian homes is to supply the children's school needs where possible and abandon the rest of the children's school learning requirements to the children and their teachers. This leads to the neglect of the impact of home-school factor which Cripps and Zyromski (2010) believes produces consistency in learning. It is therefore important to investigate parental homework supervision as a supportive strategy that enhances functional home-school learning. It is possible that homework supervision by parents may likely help in the development of learning consistency which Cripps and Zyromski (2010) refers to.

Similarly, there is inconclusive research evidence on the effect of gender on home- School learning, which is another issue of great concern to Nigerians, especially women groups. Ojerinde (2011) has observed that more girls than boys enroll in schools in south-eastern Nigeria. The reason is attributed to the fear of failure at the final examination which makes more boys than girls drop out of school to engage in retail trading or become apprenticed to traders or artisans. The author further analyzed the National enrolment of candidates for the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) for the period 1993 to 1996 and found gender disparity ratio of 54:46 in favour of the males. The author commented that the ratio still persist in 2011.

Ojerinde (2011) also analyzed success in National Examinations Council's (NECO) Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) for the years 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 in English language. The analysis showed no significant gender effect. Falade (2010) and Bello (2012) carried out survey studies at the university level and obtained significant gender disparity in favour of males. These surveys, however dealt with mature students. Ezeokoli and Osikomaiya (2011) carried out a correlation study on the achievement of boys and girls in English Language at the primary school level. The data yielded no significant gender effect.

Three out of the four gender studies reviewed here: Falade (2012), Ezeokoli and Osikomaiya (2011) and Bello (2012) presented results obtained from opinion polls. Such data are not always reliable because many respondents do not give honest responses. The fourth gender study reviewed here is the one by Ojerinde (2011), made inferences from data obtained from external examinations, over which the researcher had no control.

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The need to use more gender related data from controlled experiments still exist. Moreover many more researches need to be done before one can take an informed position on the level of gender disparity in the Nigerian context. Also all the studies listed above handled gender disparity at higher levels of education. It is necessary to ascertain from this research, whether a significant gender effect can manifest at the primary levels of education. However, although parental involvement in their children's home-work has been found to be a significant factor for improved educational achievement in the developed nations, the same conclusion cannot be drawn for children in the economically developing nations such as Nigeria. Empirical studies on the effect of parental home-work supervision on school achievement of children in Nigeria could not be located. It is necessary therefore to execute this study in order to contribute to the research on parental supportiveness as well as provide additional reference on parental supportiveness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of parental supportiveness in form of home-work supervision; on the English language achievement of Primary School pupils. It further investigated the impact of gender on the English language achievement of boys and girls. This study therefore focuses on the effect of monitored parental home-work supervision, a component of parental supportiveness on school achievement of children in English language. Two research questions guided the investigation.

Research Questions

This study sought answers to the following research questions.

1. Will parent's educational supportiveness (homework supervision) affect school children's achievement in English language?
2. Will the gender of school children affect their English Language achievement?

Research Methodology

This study is a quasi-experimental study in which pretest, post-test, control group research design was employed. Two popular co-educational day schools which are distant from each other were purposively selected for the study. The two experimental conditions were randomized for the two schools, each of which contributed intact Basic 4 classes with sufficient boys and girls to the study. The analysis of a pretest administered on pupils in the two schools revealed that they were comparable. The final sample size was 80 pupils who completed the training and all the assignments given. There were 20 boys and 20 girls from each of the two schools, who were randomly chosen from among those who completed all requirements.

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The two conditions were:

1. English language instruction coupled with monitored parental homework supervision
2. English language instruction with no deliberate supervision plan.

The two schools were tagged School "A", where study condition 1 was applied; and School "B", where study condition 2 was applied.

The parents of pupils from School "A" were contacted first by the researcher. Those who agreed to participate in the supervision of their children's homework were selected for the study. School "A" contributed 20 boys and 20 girls for the final sample which was made up of pupils whose parents collaborated with the researcher and also completed the whole study.

The parents of pupils from school "B" were not contacted and were not trained in homework supervision. The pupils from School "B" were taught the same content as that in School "A" but no attempt was made to direct on homework process and outcome. At the end of the study, 20 boys and 20 girls who completed the study were also selected from this group as part of the final sample.

School "A" parents were subsequently trained on a procedure required for homework supervision for this study after they have indicated willingness for them and their children to participate in the study. The training given to these parents consisted of guiding them in the nature and procedure of home work supervision that was to be adopted for the study. They were also provided with prepared manual to guide them while executing home-work supervision. The manual contained some key questions that parents used to ensure that their children had completed their homework as required.

The parental home-work supervision included the following requirements: selecting suitable time when the child can work at home without distractions from the family, provision of conducive environment with writing platform for use of the child, putting off appliances such as radio and television for the period of home-work. In addition, the parents were required to inspect their children's school work regularly, monitor home-work process to ensure that each child does as much of the work as possible through self-effort. The parents were required to inspect each child's previously completed work and corrections and assure that the content and process were under stood.

Parents were required to give reinforcement to school teaching by drawing the attention of their children to familiar local examples or alternatives, where necessary. Parents were to provide assistance when the child is in difficulty such as explaining meaning of difficult words and terms, correcting structural forms and spellings. The

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parents may also correct errors and misunderstandings where they occur. The use of Standard English dictionary and occasional reference to the internet were recommended. Trained research assistants were arranged to visit the different homes at mutually agreed times to observe the homework process and condition and offer any needed assistance.

The study lasted six weeks before the post test was administered. Both Schools "A" and "B" were taught by similarly trained teachers. The English language content for this study consisted of reading, comprehension, structural forms, and writing. A prepared scheme was used and a participatory approach was adopted in the classes. The pupils were given take home assignments to complete, twice a week.

School 'A' parents were instructed to forward any problems that they encountered to the researcher through their children or through the research assistants. The homework supervision schedule covered the six weeks of the study. Trained research assistants visited them at their homes twice a week, to provide assistance; at the times and days that were mutually convenient to both parties. The research assistants kept records of how effective the various were executing the homework supervision. School "A" parents were thus empowered to render determined level of learning support than they were not used to. School "B" pupils only had teaching instructions in the school. No attempt was made to involve their parents with homework supervision.

The data collection instrument was a researcher constructed English language achievement test (ELAT). The instrument was a fifty item multiple choice objective test. For scoring the test, one mark was awarded for the correct response to an item. An incorrect response was awarded a zero score. The maximum score was 50 marks. The instrument was validated by administering it on a sample of fifty pupils in a class with similar characteristics, but in another school district that did not take part in the study. The analysis of the test validation result yielded a Kuder Richardson Reliability index of 0. 87.

At the end of the six weeks of study, ELAT was administered in both schools. The results are presented and discussed below.

Results

The results of this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2 for the two research questions respectively.

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Table 1: t-test analysis of (ELAT) by level of Parental Educational supportiveness

Statistic	High Parental Support: Group A (Planned monitored)	Low Parental Support: Group B(no training & no monitoring)
Mean Score X	28.85	23.25
Standard Deviation	6.91	7.78
N	40	40
t- obt.	3.40*	

Key: * = significant at p <.05

The data in Table 1 shows that pupils with high parental supportiveness achieved significantly higher English language marks than those with low parental support. This means that in this study, the level of parental educational supportiveness affected English language achievement of the primary school children. Parental supportiveness in this study is in the form of homework supervision. This finding is in agreement with those of Drake (2000) and Christenson and Sheridan (2001), which were studies conducted in developed nations. This result is also in agreement with the findings of Kernan (2012) and Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) that differences caused by different levels of parental support are much bigger than differences caused by different levels of school quality. Kernan (2012) found that parental involvement in the educational programme, homework & overall performance of children were beneficial to the learners, teachers, school and entire community.

Christenson & Sheridan (2001) found that what parents or families did in the home environment remain significantly more important to learners' outcome than what they do in the school setting. However, the result does not agree with Adeosun (2006) who found no significant effect of parental support on English language achievement. Some other Nigerian studies; Odinko (2002) and Lawani, (2003) found significant effect of home factors on achievement. Since parental educational support is a home factor variable, this study therefore gives credence to the fact that home-factors affect the English language achievements of school children.

The study further examined the effect of gender on English language achievement as contained in Table2. The results obtained from the analysis of data according to pupils' gender are presented it Table 2.

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Table 2: t-test analysis of English Language achievement test scores for boys and girls

Statistic	Boys	Girls
Group means score	25.85	26.25
Standard Deviation	7.42	8.32
N		40
t-obt	0.22^{ns}	

Key: ns = not significant; p > .05

The data in Table 2 shows that girls achieved a slightly higher mean score than boys. However a t-test comparison revealed that the difference in mean scores was not statistically significant. This result implies that gender of pupils did not significantly influence the English language achievement of boy and girls in this study differently. This result gives hope to the stance of most researchers who tend to support parental supportiveness studies, since the study gives equal performance opportunity to both boys and girls. It means that the application of this variable (parental supportiveness) will equitably improve the English language performance of both boys and girls at the primary school level.

Discussion

On parental supportiveness, the results show that children with higher parental supportiveness obtained higher English language achievement scores than those with lower parental supportiveness. In this experiment parental supportiveness was characterized mainly by effective parental homework supervision. This condition produced effectiveness which is attributed to parental supportiveness. This result is in agreement with Christenson & Sheridan (2001) and Kernan (2012) who stated that parents or family involvement in children's school learning activities at home significantly improve their school achievement and learning stability. This result is also in agreement with the findings of Kernan (2012) and Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) which stated that higher parental support leads to higher Educational achievement and attainment by school children. Both Kernan (2012) and Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) separately found that differences caused by different levels of parental support are much bigger than differences caused by different levels of school quality. This later findings brings to the fore the great potential of parental supportiveness in promoting learning achievement among school children. These results do not however agree with those of Adeosun (2006) who found no significant effect of parental support on English language achievement of school children.

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In the case of gender, the data analyses revealed no gender effect. This result gives hopes to the stance of most researchers who tend to support parental supportiveness studies, since the results give equal performance opportunity to both boys and girls. It means that the application of this variable (parental supportiveness) will equitably promote the achievement of both boys and girls at the primary school level.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that parents' supervision of their children's English language homework plays important role in promoting the children's school achievement. This is in line with the work of Akinbote (2003). As part of the homework supervision, the parents of the children in the experimental group devoted time to regularly check the work previously completed by the children and the new ones too. The interest the participating parents showed in their children's work might have likely added impetus to the performance of the children that produced the significant treatment effect. It is likely that the interest that parents showed in supervising the homework of their children might have improved the confidence of the children, a situation that might aided their performance.

Recommendations

This researcher therefore recommended that parents and guardians should take interest in providing their children and wards opportunity to study at home and carry out their academic assignment (homework with parental supervision). Parents should also assist their children to scale through their learning difficulties by offering explanations as well as alternative learning materials, cooperative learning opportunities with peers and possible electronic learning devices such as the internet. More researches should be conducted in controlled environment so that the most suitable combination of variables that will help improve school children's achievement in English Language may be known. Schools in Nigeria should device strategies for reaching out to the parents and the community in which they operate. By doing so, there is hope that improved learning atmosphere will develop between school and community which will in turn encourage improved learning outputs by the school children.

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