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LOCUS OF CONTROL AS A CORRELATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN IBADAN

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Abstract

The search for means of improving performance and consequently ameliorating declining achievement in English at public examinations have made it imperative for researchers to explore the psychological bases of academic achievement prominent among which is locus of control of learners. Its relationship with learners' achievement in English. is the focus of this study. The descriptive research design was adopted in the study which attempted to provide answers to three research questions. The participants were 300 SSII students while locus of control scale ($r=.72$ and English language achievement test $r=.87$) were the instruments used for data collection. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test. Findings revealed that the locus of control of students positively correlates with their English Language achievement ($r=.670$); but students with internal and external locus of control did not differ significantly in their English Language achievement ($t=.513; df=298; P<.05$). Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers of English should factor learner' locus of control into their instructional programmes for improved performance.

Key Words: Academic Achievement; English Language; Internal Locus, External Locus, Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

English Language is a tool through which people across the globe engage in effective and active communication with one another. Equally, the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of Nigerian polity on the one hand and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language on the other have led to the adoption of English language as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication (Fakeye 2002). The 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. However, the poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has

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been explained as a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria (Adeosun,2004).

Despite this, English language has become the pivot on which the educational wheel of Nigeria rotates. Thus, the importance of English language as a school subject derives mainly from its utilitarian value to the larger Nigerian society. English is the official language of administration and commerce. It is major language of science. Above all, Fakeye (2002) had emphasized the importance of the use of English language in improving communication among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. He further highlighted the need for improving the quality of spoken and written English language among school children. However, one of the current educational problems of public interest is that of poor performance students in English language especially in public examinations (Kolawole 1998).

A Daily Sketch Publication of 28TH August 2006, on "Causes and Cures of Poor Performance at West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) in 2006" identified and categorized problems responsible for students' poor performance mostly in English language to problems of teachers, problems of inadequate facilities in the schools, problem traceable to students, problems caused by parents and society at large and problems of government policies and low funding of the education sector. Studies had indicated that there is an awareness of the importance of the effect of locus of control on student's academic performance. It is observed that most students' experience poor performance in English language due to the effect and incidence of some locus of control factors incomprehensible to the student's. Thus, Amadi (2010); Araromi (2010) in their studies posit that both internal and external locus of control are important predictors for academic achievement. Araromi defines this sense of control or locus of control as the extent to which an individual believes that he or she has control over an outcome.

Locus of control is viewed as an important aspect of psychology developed by Julian Rotter in 1966. It is a generalized belief about the underlying causes of events of his or her life. Individual has diverse belief about who controls his or her destiny. In other words, an individual's destiny could be controlled by oneself, fate, god or powerful others. Trylong (1987) gave a full name to the concept as 'Locus of control of reinforcement'. He tried to bridge the gap between behavioural and cognitive psychology. He is of the view that behaviour is guided largely by reinforcements which could be in form of rewards and punishments. Individual holds the belief about what causes their actions through contingencies such as rewards and punishments. These beliefs give the kind of attitude people adopt towards an event. In other words, the locus of control has a correlational link with attitude. In the context of foreign language learning, learners hold different beliefs about their success or failure in the foreign language programme. A student who has a poor performance in a foreign language programme may ascribe his failure to the difficulty of the language, the attitude of the foreign language instructor, inadequacy in the teaching methods adopted by the foreign language instructor. These beliefs would invariably determine the locus of control of the learner.

Thus, Locus of control refers to an individual's generalized expectations concerning where control over subsequent events resides. In other words, who or what is responsible for what happens. It is analogous to, but distinct from, attributions. According to Amadi ,the "attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why

people do what they do, i.e., attribute causes to behaviour." There is a three stage process which underlies an attribution. Step one: the person must perceive or possibly observe the behaviour. Step two is to try and figure out if the behaviour was intentional, and step three is to determine if the person was forced to perform that behaviour. The latter occur after the fact, that is, they are explanations for events that have already happened. Expectancy, which concerns future events, is a critical aspect of locus of control. Locus of control is grounded in expectancy-value theory, which describes human behaviour as determined by the perceived likelihood of an event or outcome occurring contingent upon the behaviour in question, and the value placed on that event or outcome. More specifically, expectancy-value theory states that if (a) someone values a particular outcome and (b) that person believes that taking a particular action will produce that outcome, then (c) they are more likely to take that particular action.

Umoh (1991) classified generalized beliefs concerning who or what influences things along a bipolar dimension from internal to external control: "Internal control" is the term used to describe the belief that control of future outcomes resides primarily in oneself while "external control" refers to the expectancy that control is outside of oneself, either in the hands of powerful other people or due to fate/chance. Araromi (2010) divided locus of control into two non-dimensional units namely, internal locus of control and external locus of control. A learner who has an internal locus of control orientation believes that his or her behaviour is guided by his or her personal decisions and efforts while a learner with an external locus of control orientation believes that his or her behaviour is guided by fate, luck or external circumstances. Amadi (2010) is of the opinion that a more internal locus of control is generally seen as desirable. They opined that having an internal locus of control could also be regarded as having self-agency, personal control and self determination. They further opined in their research findings also that male tends to be more internal than females.

Therefore, Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. Individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behavior and actions. Those with a high external locus of control believe that powerful others, fate, or chance primarily determine events. Those with a high internal locus of control have better control of their behavior, tend to exhibit more political behaviors, and are more likely to attempt to influence other people than those with a high external locus of control; they are more likely to assume that their efforts will be successful. They are more active in seeking information and knowledge concerning their situation (Araromi,2010).

Consequently, research has shown that having an internal locus of control is related to higher academic achievement (Amadi,2010) , students with internal locus of control earn better grades and work harder(Williams,1990) and include spending more time on home work as well as studying longer for test. Hence, students with an internal locus of control have been found to do better academically (Trylong, 1987). In another study, Shammen, (2004) reported that children who have an internal locus of control tend to have higher levels of academic achievement than those with external locus of control.

A number of previous studies have identified significant relationships between locus of control and academic achievement (Siegal, 1992; Baker, 1998; Stubbs,2001). From these studies it was concluded that internals tend to show superior achievement

in comparison to their external counterparts. Another research presented by Umoh (1991) confirmed the evidence that there is a relationship between locus of control and academic achievement levels. Also many researches on academic achievement had focused on students' perceptions of the psychological factors related to academic achievement (Williams, 1990).

Tucker, Hamayan and Genesse (2006) also believe that the people become more internal as they get older. It is controversial in the field of psychology holding the belief that internal locus of control is desirable while external locus of control is undesirable and vice-versa. It is assumed that the two subtleties are desirable depending on the circumstances surrounding the action or event. In learning situation, internal orientation needs to be accomplished by competence, self-efficacy and opportunity. On the other hand it is believed that internal who lacks competence, self-efficacy and opportunity can become neurotic, anxious and depressed. In foreign language learning situation, learners who have internal locus of control must be able to demonstrate high level of competence, intelligence and aptitude for learning of the language in order to be able to achieve success in the language programme. As earlier mentioned, if learners are optimistic of achieving success in a foreign language programme and lack the competence, intelligence and self-efficacy in the learning process, they may become depressed or over anxious and drop out of the foreign language class. This view is also supported by Araromi (2010). This explanation draws our attention to the relationship between foreign language aptitude and locus of control. Sometimes locus of control is seen as a stable personality construct but research findings and theories held the view that locus of control could be learned.

According to Baker(1998), the term "locus of control" is a generalised expectancy for internal as opposed to external control of reinforcements. In the same vein, Shammen (2004) states that locus of control refers to what one ascribes responsibility or blames for what is happening in one's life. The dichotomy between external and internal loci of control is aptly captured by Trylong (1987) when he states that internality and externality represent two ends of a continuum, not as either/or typology. A locus of control indicates the influence that circumstances/environment or individual characters/traits have on directing people's activities. Research indicates that people perform better when they have a moderate to strong internal locus of control. The position of the locus of control is significant because all things being equal, people will either see themselves as masters of their destiny or victims of circumstances. However, the latter being true, Tucker et al (2007) are of the opinion that people with an external locus of control tend to be more stressed and prone to clinical depression. Furthermore, external locus of control makes people vulnerable to manipulation and open to abuse since externals would depend largely on the reinforcement by significant others for everything they do. Conversely, internals are more at peace with themselves and they take responsibility for their mistakes and successes.

In addition to the existing variables, Shammen (2004) adds three psychological characteristics; perception of competence, perceived internal locus of control, and intrinsic motivation. These writers also claim that the internal perceptions of students as to the locus of control regarding academic success or failure are important for the development of learner competency. In other words, students may take more responsibility for learning if they believe themselves to be competent (Araromi,2010).

Emphasizing this continuum, Williams(1990) and Stubbs (2001) claim that learners who are able to self-regulate the locus of control throughout the learning experience are strategic learners. Those learners learn through the positive experience of a good performance, through the experience of others, through verbal persuasion, and through a positive physiological state, and eventually develop their self-regulatory skills to the point where they become self-regulated proficient learners and take control of their learning process.

Statement of the problem

The poor academic achievement of secondary school students in English language posed a great threat to their academic well-being and societal development. It has been suggested by scholars that students' locus of control be explored as a way of helping them to overcome problem of poor performance in English. Hence, this study examined the relationship between locus of control and Senior Secondary Students Achievement in English language in Ibadan, North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between locus of students and their achievement in English Language?
2. Is there any significant difference in English language achievement of students with internal and external locus of control?

Significance of the study

This study will provide an insight into psychological root of falling standard of English language proficiency among senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Findings from this study will also help to raise the proficiency level of Nigerian secondary school curriculum planners and all stakeholders in Education would also be sensitized about the indispensable position of English language in the overall knowledge acquisition process in formal education.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design .The participants for the study were 300 senior secondary school two students randomly selected from ten (10) secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government. Thirty (30) students male and female were randomly selected from each of the ten schools. The instruments used for data collection were Locus of Control Scale and English Language Achievement test. The Locus of Control Scale was adapted from Araromi (2010) and it contains items that were structured to elicit responses from the students to determine their locus of control . Responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1-4 where: 4=Strongly Agreed, 3=Agreed, 2=Stronly Disagreed, and 1=Disagree. It was re-validated through a pilot survey by the researcher and Crombach alpha was used to determine reliability which yielded a coefficient of .72. The English Language Achievement Test is a standardized test adapted from past West African Examination English Paper two question. It comprised 50 multiple choice items covering aspects of English like grammar, comprehension,idioms,and lexical items It was re-validated using test –retest and a co-efficient of .87 was obtained.This indicates that the instrument is very reliable The questionnaire was administered and collected back on the spot. This was followed by the administration of English Language achievement

test The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the relationship between locus of control and Achievement in English Language while t-test was used to determine significant difference in English language achievement of students with internal and external locus of control.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Is there any significant relationship between locus of control of students and their achievement in English Language?

Table 1: PPMC correlation of locus of control and students' English Language achievement?

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Achievement in English Language	41.767	9.9375	300	.670	.228	significant.
Locus of Control	52.8300	7.4156				

It is shown in the above table that there was significant relationship between Achievement in English Language and Locus of Control ($r = .670$)

From the table, locus of control had a positive correlation with the Achievement in English Language of the students.

Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference in English language achievement of students with internal and external locus of control?

Table 2: T-test comparison of English language achievement of students with internal and external locus of control?

Achievement in English Language	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	Df	P
Internal Control	124	41.4274	13.3540	1.96	.513	298	.609
External Control	176	40.8295	9.6555				

The above table showed that there was no significant difference in the Achievement test in English Language of students with Internal and External locus of Controls ($t = .513$, $df = 298$, $P < .05$).

Discussion of Findings

The result revealed that there was significant relationship between Achievement in English Language and Locus of Control ($r = .670$, $N = 300$, $P < .05$). The reason for this can be viewed in the light of the fact that locus of control is a concept that plays an important role in human development. Umoh (1991) has defined the concept of control most explicitly. He defines an event as controllable when a person's voluntary responses have an impact on the consequences of that event. However, in certain situations, lack of control can lead to a quite different psychological state known as reactance. Siegal (1992) argues that the initial response to uncontrollable outcomes is an increase in motivation and performance in order to attempt to regain control. Thus, a student initially having difficulty in attaining proficiency in English language and appreciating the importance of English language to his / her future educational advancement may be motivated to learn English language and achieve positively. Thus, Locus of Control conceptualizes how individuals see their own actions affecting the events that surround their lives (Baker,1998).

The result also showed that there was significant difference in the Achievement test in English Language of students with Internal and External locus of Controls ($t = 4.513$, $df = 298$, $P > .05$ level). The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that

locus of control either internal or external influences human attitude or behaviour. Therefore, the way and manner an individual appraises his/her locus of control would determine if it will have a positive or negative on the individuals' level of attainment. Knowing the importance of English language to students' educational progress would probably have been responsible for the no significant difference found in the level of achievement in English language of students experiencing either internal or external locus of control. Thus, the way students interpret the need for them to achieve in English language have profound effect on their psychological well-being. Supporting this assertion, Tucker (2006) pointed out that successful learning is related to learners' beliefs and perceptions towards their own learning.

Recommendation

Language classroom should have at its base a consideration of what learners need to learn, their interests and the goals of the target language in order to bring the best out of the learners' linguistic tendencies. The affective and intellectual resources of learners are necessary in language teaching. ESL teachers should, therefore, endeavour to exploit these resources and link them to the experience of learners. This pedagogical enrichment principle is necessary for the selection of and presentation of English language contents and classroom activities, which must be learner-centred.

Conclusion

The value placed on English language as the vehicle of communication and a means of business and social interaction in Nigeria necessitates that it is properly taught and learnt. As such, researchers' searchlights should continuously be beamed towards all factors that can promote effective learning of the subject whether such factors are internal or external to students.

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