

Effect of school mode on language learning strategies of Nigerian secondary school students

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ABSTRACT

A number of factors such as gender, nationality; ethnicity and even family socio-economic status have been investigated in relation to their effects on language learning strategy (LLS) choice among learners of English as second language (ESL). However, fewer studies attempted to investigate the effect of school mode on LLS choice and especially as it relates to secondary school learners of ESL. This study investigated the LLS employed by Nigerian secondary school students in relation to their school mode. A total of 559 senior secondary school students were selected from 20 Nigerian secondary schools to participate in this study. The study adopted a quantitative survey method supported by qualitative data. The research instruments used for data collection were a modified Oxford's study inventory of language learning consisting of 55 items on a 5-level Likert scale and an open-ended interview questions. The instrument was tested and the reliability index on Cronbach's alpha was .816. SPSS version 16.0 was employed to establish the strategies employed, correlation test and t-tests were conducted at a .05 level of significance to establish relationships. Findings show that Nigerian secondary school students are high users of LLS and that statistically a significant relationship exists between school mode and the LLS employed. The findings of the study has pedagogical implications for English language teachers and English language curriculum designers that could assist in understanding the English language learning patterns of Nigerian secondary school students.

Field of Research: Language Learning Strategies, Secondary school students, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Interestingly, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) now focuses not only on the identification of pattern of learning strategies used by the ESL students but is also into establishing possible correlation of individuals learning strategies in relation to certain variables like gender, proficiency level, age, belief, motivation, class situation, examinations and so forth (El-Dib, 2004; Mohamed 2000). Learning strategies as conscious ideas and actions employed by ESL/EFL learner to aid in achieving his/her learning goals has continued to attract a lot of attention from social and cognitive psychology, linguistics and language pedagogy as well. Learning strategies exposes the metacognitive plan of student regarding his/her own thinking and learning approaches, a great understanding of exactly what the learning task entails, and also the chance to make use of the methods that best meet both task demands and the individual learner talents.

According to Oxford (2003), the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit the learning task at hand. Learning strategies are more or less useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulated learning. Learning strategies are employed differently to help in inducing individual learner's proficiency, confidence and lower his anxiety in times of communication difficulties. Learning strategies refer to specific actions and behaviors, and could involve seeking conversation partners, or even giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task.

The key goal of the Nigerian national policy on education is to prepare the citizens for useful living within the society and for higher education in the modern age of science and technology. Secondary school education thus became the means to pivot the achievement of this goal. In order to raise a set of individuals who will remain competitive in a global village in the age of information, the language of instruction becomes a pertinent issue. Though fallout from the era of colonialism, English language has risen in rank to become the language of international communication across the globe and is the language of instruction in Nigeria beginning from the fourth year of elementary schooling. As a result, a considerable proficiency in English language must be attained for a satisfactory academic performance to be achieved. English language incompetence is no doubt a threat to understanding even the other school subjects.

However, in spite of the fact that by the end of high school education, the average student would have been exposed to a decade of learning of English, performance at the senior secondary certificate examinations (SSCE) has remained very poor and a consternation to stakeholders. This becomes all the more worrisome because taking the next steps in the academic journey is pivoted on excellent performance in English and other subjects in the SSCE.

The challenge of poor performance or mastery of English language is however a global issue in the education sector of most nations. Attempts to proffer solutions to the challenge of this poor performance has informed studies of varying magnitude; however, only very few really focused on the English as a Second Language (ESL) learner or the strategies employed by the learner while learning English language.

The submissions of researchers as regards the reasons for this poor performance varies, from the effects of over-populated, poorly furnished or inadequate classrooms, poor school locations to adherence to the traditional, teacher-centered pattern of teaching and learning of English language (Ariyo, 2010). Others associated the decline in academic achievements of secondary school students to school location and factors of child, family,

school, society and government as predictors of academic achievement and recommend a look into unique learner variables, such level of parental involvement, child's motivation and teacher's attitudes, Akeredolu-Ale, (2007). None of the studies gave consideration to the great impact of language learning strategies and or learner autonomy.

English is officially the language of instruction across the levels of education in Nigeria and this has continued to give the average Nigerian secondary school student additional pressure of having to be proficient in the language of instruction to be able to comprehend school subjects. Something is therefore wrong with the learning pattern of the English which may be attributed to the schooling methods/learning environment. There are basically two types of secondary schooling in Nigeria; boarding and daily schooling. This study is carried out to establish if school mode affects the language learning strategies choice among Nigerian secondary school students.

2. Literature Review

Studies on second language acquisition have revealed that, learners' performance can be enhanced through employing certain language learning strategies. Accordingly, learning strategies play a very important role in SLA (Oxford, 1990; Green and Oxford, 1995). According to Mohammed (2000) good language learners often are active information processors and interpreters who employ numerous strategies to store and retrieve information. Thus, employing numerous but appropriate language learning strategies (LLS) is considered fundamental in facilitating learning and mastery of the target language. Successful students also involved themselves in other exercises like analyzing lesson problem, ordering and planning lessons as well as carrying out pronunciation activities.

The effective acquisition of English is a stepping stone towards achieving good grades not only in the English subject but also in other school subjects. According to Munkaila and Haruna (2001), the ability to competently communicate in the language of the colonial master is appreciated so much as it carries with it some privileges, power and prestige. Language learning strategies offers the antidote to ineffective language learning. Oxford (1990) observed that, employing appropriate learning strategies positively influences the learning of ESL. The purpose of this study therefore is to assess the use of language learning strategies by Nigerian secondary school students in learning English in relation to school mode and establish how the variable affect their general choice of learning strategies. School mode as a factor influencing language learning strategies choice has not been adequately investigated and reports are scarce on its potential and importance. Available studies in other settings other than Nigeria have shown that boarding school system can ensure English language proficiency and on the relationship between performance and the type of school attended (Charity, Scarborough, and Griffin, 2004; Rickford, 1999) reported boarding schools provide opportunities for English language usage hence influence fluency which in turn affect scores.

Recently, Hatch (2011), studied 12 pupil each from a K-12 boarding schools with different nationalities. The results showed that as much as the students were taking EFL in their various schools, they felt uncomfortable speaking it in school for fear of being teased at by native speaking mates. The students stated that in addition, they take EFL outside the school. They reported of acquiring their language proficiency when they were outside the school.

In another study, Courtoy and Fryer (2012) to reveal the potential of a boarding school system for the poor in the USA, providing evidence of the effect of the boarding

system on the English language proficiency of the students. They noted that the impact of attending boarding schools on student achievement is significantly larger than that of the average charter school. This is in agreement with evidence brought forward by Charity, Scarborough, and Griffin (2004) and Rickford (1999) which revealed that a students' from boarding schools fluency to the Standard English dialect (in contrast to African American Vernacular English) has a strong correlation with test scores in reading. Courtoy and Fryer (2012) added that if SEED students have a high probability to speak non-standard English at home compared to school, then a boarding program could result in increased reading gains.

Apparently, those studies are in settings other than Nigeria with a unique public school mode, over-populated classrooms, with inadequate learning infrastructure and insecurity, just to mention a few challenges to learning in Nigeria. The current study therefore is an attempt in bridging this existing literature gap.

3. Methodology

A modified SILL questionnaire was used as a measurement instrument for this study. The modified instrument involves nine constructs; memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social, situational and religious strategies of English language learning. The overall Alpha Cronbach's value analysis was .816 which translates that each item was understood by most of the respondents.

3.1 Sample and data collection method

The data for this research was provided by 559 respondents who study English as a second language and in their senior level of secondary school education in Nigeria. The respondents in the study belong to both boarding and daily schools. Twenty public secondary schools were involved in this study. On the average, between 25 and 28 respondents were systematically selected from each school except Government Girls Secondary School, which is a boarding school, where 51 respondents or 9.1 percent were selected and General Murtala Muhammad College, Yola where 50 respondents or 9.0 percent were selected. These two schools have higher number of respondent because of the relatively few numbers of boarding schools in the study area and they have to be adequately represented, see Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: Distribution of Respondents of the Study

School Mode	Sampled Respondents	Percentage
Daily Schools	458	81.9
Boarding Schools	101	18.1
Total	559	100.0

3.2 Data analysis

In order to answer the two research questions data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 16.0. RQ1: *What language learning strategies do Nigerian secondary school students use in learning English?* RQ2: *Is there any significant difference in LLS employed by Nigerian secondary school students based on school mode?*

4. Finding & Discussion

There were eight taxonomies of learning strategies investigated by the current study. These strategies are memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, social, situational and religious. Table 2.0 clearly indicates that, the respondents in this study reported employing all the language learning strategies investigated in this study. They employed strategies between the minimum of 3.7835 mean score to the maximum mean score of 4.2442. This answer the research question 1: *What language learning strategies do Nigerian secondary school students use in learning English?*

Table 2.0: LLS employed by Nigerian Secondary School Students

Strategy categories	Respondents	Mean of usage
Memory	559	3.7835
Cognitive	559	3.9379
Compensation	559	3.4010
Meta-cognitive	559	4.2184
Affective	559	4.0863
Social	559	4.2442
Situational	559	3.9445
Religious	559	3.7722

Apparently, respondents in this study employed all the eight categories of language learning strategies considered by the current study while learning English language. It is also apparent that respondents employed most of the learning strategies within closely related frequency level. For instance, seven of the learning strategies reported were employed within the range of 3.77 and 4.24 which is high (Oxford, 1990 mean score interpretation). Only the compensation strategy recorded a mean score of 3.40 and falls within the medium level category. The findings from this research obviously indicated that secondary school students in Nigeria are high users of LLS. LLS have been proven to significantly affect students' communicative ability and effective language learning. The analysis of relationship between school mode and LSS employed by Nigerian secondary school students is presented in Table 3.0 and Table 3.1.

The independent variable is school mode and the dependent variable is the LLS. Correlation test and t-test was conducted for the eight dependent variables against the dependent variable of school mode. The result of the correlation test and t-test is presented in Table 4.20 and Table 3.0.

Table 3.0: Correlation test between School mode and LLS employed

Variables	Correlation	Sig. Level.
School mode & memory strategies	-0.180	.000
School mode & cognitive strategies	-0.121	.004
School mode & compensation strategies	-0.145	.001
School mode & metacognitive strategies	-0.108	.011
School mode & affective strategies	-0.077	.071
School mode & social strategies	-0.101	.017
School mode & situational strategies	0.028	.511
School mode & religious strategies	0.065	.126

From the Table 3.0 above it can be seen that, there is a significant correlation between school mode and memory strategy employed by secondary school students in Nigeria while learning English language. The analysis shows that, the correlation value $r = -0.180$ at 0.05 alpha level, $pvalue (0.00 \leq p \leq 0.05)$. There is also a weak negative relationship between school mode and cognitive strategies used ($r=-0.121$) which is significant and $pvalue = 0.004$); relationship between compensation strategies used and school mode was also negative and weak ($r=-0.145$) and the relationship is significant at $pvalue = 0.001$).

There is also a weak negative relationship between school mode and metacognitive strategies used ($r=-0.108$) while test of significance reveals that $Pvalue = 0.011$ which is significant. However, for the affective strategies employed and school mode, result shows a weak negative relationship ($r=-0.077$) but which is not significant ($Pvalue = 0.071$). The relationship between school mode and social strategies employed was also found to be weak and negative ($r=-0.101$ and significant test revealed $Pvalue = 0.17$ which denotes significance and between school mode and situational and religious strategies employed, the results indicated positive but weak relationships which were both insignificant at ($r=.028$, $PValue = .511$ and ($r=.065$, $PValue= .126$ respectively).

The t-test conducted on the sample shows *significant difference between Nigerian secondary school students in employing LLS based on school mode*. The analysis implies that school mode is a factor in determining language learning strategies employed by Nigerian secondary school students, see Table 3.1. Attending a boarding or day school is therefore significantly related to the LLS employed by the respondents hence the use of LLS differently.

Table 3.1: t-test of School Mode and LLS Employed

Variables measured	t	dF	Sig. Level
School mode & memory strategies	-81.126	558	.000
School mode & cognitive strategies	-98.887	558	.000

School mode & compensation strategies	-61.151	558	.000
School mode & metacognitive strategies	-01.392	558	.000
School mode & affective strategies	-92.492	558	.000
School mode & social strategies	-100.080	558	.000
School mode & situational strategies	-76.803	558	.000
School mode & religious strategy	-59.456	558	.000

4. Discussion

The result as shown in Table3.1 revealed a substantial distinction between day and boarding school students in employing LLS. The daily school system was just introduced in to the school system in Nigeria in the early 1980's. To many students the home background conditions could not support effective academic reading nor encourage good study habits. The present home configurations especially within the north where this study was based might not have transformed considerably to provide academically stimulating atmosphere due largely to poverty in the area in comparison to the southern and eastern Nigeria.

Additionally, the level of insecurity and religious uprising is comparatively higher in the north as such parents prefer to take their children to daily schools. Furthermore, the general public boarding schools are lacking fundamental academic facilities. There is no steady electricity supply, teaching gadgets are not sufficient and above all the general security of the students is not guaranteed. Not long ago the Boko Haram Islamists abducted over 200 female boarding school students and killed many male students. This case poses serious challenges to academic excellence. The daily students therefore have an upper hand to do better in the current Nigeria especially in the north.

5. Conclusion

Conclusively, the study submits that Nigerian boarding and daily secondary school students differ significantly in employing memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social, situational and religious strategies, at a 0.05 level of significance. And except in extra-curricular activities daily students exhibited more learning strategies than boarding students.

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