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Measuring Attitudinal Disposition of Undergraduate Students to English Language Learning: The Nigerian University Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the undergraduate students' attitudinal disposition towards English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language in the course of their studying in a Nigerian university. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The sample consisted of an intact class of 332 Part 3 undergraduate students who registered for EDU 309 (English Teaching Methods). A researcher-developed instrument was used to collect data. Data collected were analysed using independent t-test statistical method. The results showed that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language. Further, the findings indicated that there existed a significant difference in students' interest in learning English language and perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. Thus, teachers should motivate their students to learn better English by highlighting its importance as they need English for their academic achievement.

Keywords: Attitudinal disposition, scholastic disposition, English language learning, interest, perception

1. Introduction

In Nigerian educational system, English language is official medium of instruction at all levels of educational ladder especially at tertiary education level. Thus, learning English as a crucial medium of classroom instruction makes it unavoidable for students to gaining knowledge in many fields as it has emerged as the foremost World's lingua franca. All textbooks used in Nigeria, from Nursery/Kindergarten, primary to secondary schools and tertiary institutions, which includes universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses (Ibrahim 2016; National Policy on Education, 2013), are written and taught in English. In fact, no tertiary institution in the country will grant admission to any prospective students seeking admission into its fold without a good grade in English language. Hence, students are expected to have a considerable proficiency in English language in order to be able to continue higher studies and communicate when required (Ibrahim, 2016).

However, the communicative competency of most undergraduate students is quite poor. They cannot communicate with others even by using simple sentences, orally or in writing, though the English curriculum is principally based on the communicative approach and these students are given a total of six years of English language instruction at the secondary school level. This problem is obviously noticed in school leavers who join the English Department of the university, and are supposed to be more competent in this course compared to their peers, who join other disciplines (Ibrahim, 2016). This phenomenon has been an issue that most concern researchers in the Nigerian universities, hence this study.

As students' attitude is an integral part of learning, likewise, it is an essential component of English language learning pedagogy in Nigeria. Students' attitude toward learning is believed to influence their behaviours such as selecting and

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reading books written in English, speaking fluent but impeccable English, to mention only a few (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2013).

Further, Ajzen and Fishbein (2013) claimed that the classroom experience shows that if the students have positive attitude in any subject they achieve many things in that specific subject area as there is an interaction between language learning and the classroom component in which the students grown up. Hence both negative and positive attitudes have a strong impact on the success of English language learning especially amongst undergraduate students. The importance of attitude and by extension, disposition, to behaviour has been canvassed in literature. For instance, research confirms that linking general attitudes to specific actions, and the reasoned action approach to the prediction of specific behaviors have advanced our understanding of the attitude–behavior relation and have demonstrated the importance of attitudes as determinants of behaviour.

Against this backdrop, there is no doubt that English language attitudes account for a considerable proportion of language learning. Hence student's attitudinal factors can play a larger role in learning English language. Considering the importance attached to the learning of English language in Nigerian educational system, it is very vital to study the undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English language and its effects on their scholastic achievement in a Nigerian University.

Therefore, this study is significant to teachers, students, parents, and researchers. It is significant to teachers in sense that positive attitudes of their students towards a specific subject will help them to understand their lesson easily and clearly. It is also significant to students because it will enlighten them to know that good attitudinal disposition towards learning English language would ease their difficulties in their academics. Parents and researchers can also benefit from this research work, parents can know how to motivate their children and guide them to have good attitudes throughout their schooling. Researchers can use this work when they are conducting similar or related work. Based on this premise, this study sought to establish the direction of the pull and push of factors affecting students' attitude towards learning of English language, students' interest in English language learning, and students' perception of English language learning specifically among university undergraduates of the Sule Lamido University, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

According to Allport (2002), attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to object and situation with which it is related. Accordingly, the attitude concept has three components namely behavioural, cognitive, and affective. These three attitudinal aspects are based on the three theoretical approaches of behaviourism, cognitivism, and humanism, respectively. The behavioural aspect of attitude deals with the way students behave and react in particular learning situation. In fact, the successful English language learning helps the learners to identify themselves with the native speakers of that language and acquire or adopt various aspects of behaviours which characterize the members of the target language community.

Lovell (2005) observed that children attitudes are useful basics for instruction and the performance of students might depend on their feeling about the teacher and subject. The way students perceived English language influences their attitudes towards it, and this attitude to English language determines their academic achievement. Also, Choy and Troud (2006) stated that attitude can help the learners to express whether they like or dislike the object or surrounding situation. It is agreed that the inner feelings and emotions of learners influence their perspectives and their attitudes toward English language learning.

English language was introduced in Nigeria in the early 19th century by the British colonial administration. Although English language is a foreign language in Nigeria, in the sense that is not indigenous but widely used in Nigeria as the second language. Ever since it was introduced in Nigeria, it has survived many decades and still survives to date as it assumes a more vital status in Nigeria (Omolewa, 2002).

Bamgbose (2007) reported that English language in Nigeria was the language of colonial administration which has succeeded in eliminating the problems of multiple language in Nigeria. English language has played a major role in Nigeria which could be seen in our education, government, business, commerce, mass media, and most of internal and external communication. Above all, English language has played the role of the language of political unity. Today, people come across with English language in every part of their life making it a necessity to learn. Formal education in Nigeria today is a product of English language. Without English, there is the possibility that there may not be

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anything more than the elementary formal education in Nigeria. Despite the importance of English language, the performance of students over the years has been on a downward trend. Media reports show that the performance of students in written and spoken English is not encouraging (Bamgbose, 2007).

2.1 Research Hypotheses

Towards this end, three hypotheses were generated for the study namely:

Ho_1: Factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language will not significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference in students' interest in learning English language owing to their scholastic disposition to English language.

Ho_3: There is no significant difference in students' perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was used in this study. This involved the survey of undergraduate students' perceived attitudinal disposition to the English learning and its impact on their scholastic achievement with the use of questionnaire. The nature of this research, the sample and data collected determined the relevance/appropriateness of this design. All undergraduate students who registered for a compulsory course in 'English Teaching Methods' during the Harmattan Semester of 2016/2017 Session in the Faculty of Education of the Sule Lamido University, Kafin Hausa, Jigawa State, Nigeria, constituted the target population for the study.

3.2 Participants

There were 332 undergraduate students who registered for the course during the session. The sample consisted of an intact class of 332 part 3 undergraduate students who registered for EDU 309: English Teaching Methods in Harmattan Semester of 2016/2017 session. Thus, the entire population was therefore used and no sampling was carried out. This was due to the homogeneity and small size of the study sample. Also, the choice of the EDU 309 is appropriate in this study due to its Faculty status as a compulsory course aimed at introducing the basic procedures involved in the teaching of English at post-primary level in Nigeria, as well as the procedures involved in the curriculum and instruction in English language of acceptable standard.

3.3 Research Instrument

The main instrument used in collecting relevant data for this study was "Students Attitudinal Disposition and Scholastics in English Language Learning Questionnaire (SADSELQ)" developed by the researchers. The design of the questionnaire relied heavily on information from literature review. The questionnaire has three sections. Section one elicited bio-data of respondents while section two measured perceived attitudinal disposition towards learning of English language. Ten items measured this variable. Section three measured factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language and their general scholastic activities in English learning achievement. Twenty items measured these variables. Responses on sections two and three were graded on a four-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The face and content validity of the instrument was established by means of approval ratings by experts in the fields of English language, Tests and Measurement, Sociology, and Psychology of Education, respectively. The reliability of the questionnaire was established through pilot testing of instrument, using test-retest reliability method within three week-time difference and interval. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.82. This reliability coefficient ($r = 0.82$; $p<0.05$) was considered high enough and valid for using in the study.

3.5 Data Collection

The instrument was administered personally by the researchers with the assistance of both the EDU 309 course Lecturer and two Graduate Assistants in the Department of Education, Sule Lamido University, Kafin Hausa.

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Participants' responses to the questionnaire were, on retrieval, scored variable-by-variable and used to categorise them into high and low groups on each variable under investigation.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data obtained from questionnaire administration were analysed through calculating the total score for each respondent on each of the variables tested. The mean ($\bar{x}$) scores, and standard deviations for each variable were computed before using independent t-test statistical method to test hypotheses formulated in the study. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

4.1 Hypothesis One: In the null form, the hypothesis stated that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language will not significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language. To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of each factor were first computed. Thereafter, independent t-test was used to determine whether a significant difference exists between the mean ratings in relation to students' English learning scholastic achievement scores. The result of the analysis is presented in Tables 1 and 2 as follows:

Table 1. Means ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation of ranking of factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning of English language

Factors	Mean Scores ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Students always forget vocabulary and verbs tenses	6.16	3.34
The absence of encouragement from the teacher	5.82	3.10
English is not introduced at earlier age	4.05	2.62
The textbook is not available	4.01	2.08
The time of the lesson is not enough	3.77	1.87
Students do not speak English at home	3.39	1.99
Students think that English is the language of English people	3.18	1.87
English is taught by non-specialist teacher	2.98	1.06
English is not used in daily life	2.98	1.94
Students' beliefs that English is difficult	2.73	2.18

Table 1 presents the mean ($\bar{x}$) ranking of factors affecting factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language. As shown in Table 1, students ranked such factors as they always forget vocabulary and verbs tenses as number one factor ($\bar{x}$ = 6.16; SD= 3.34); followed by the absence of encouragement from the teacher ($\bar{x}$ = 5.82; SD = 3.10); then followed by English is not introduced at earlier age ($\bar{x}$ = 4.05; SD = 2.62); the textbook is not available ($\bar{x}$ = 4.01; SD = 2.08); the time of the lesson is not enough; they do not speak English at home ($\bar{x}$ = 3.39; SD = 1.99); then students think that English is the language of English is not specialist teacher ($\bar{x}$ = 2.98; SD = 1.06); and English is not used in day life ($\bar{x}$ = 2.98; SD = 1.98); as number eight factors, students belief that English is difficult ($\bar{x}$ = 2.73; SD = 2.18); as the last factors. Further, the result of the independent t-test shows that t- calculated value of 16.78 is greater than the critical t- value of 1.650 given 330 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This result is significant hence, the null hypothesis was disconfirmed. This means that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language. The result of analysis is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2. Difference in students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language

Attitudinal Disposition	N	Mean Scores ($\bar{x}$)	Sd	Md	Df	t-cal	t-critical
High Attitudinal Disposition	104	72.40	2.14				
				4.01	330	4.78*	1.650
Low Attitudinal Disposition	208						
		68.39	2.60				

***Significant; df. = 330; p< 0.05**

4.2 Hypothesis Two: In the null form, the hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in students' interest in learning English language owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. To test this hypothesis, independent t-test statistical method was used to analyse the data. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Difference in students' interest in English language learning due to their scholastic disposition to English language

Students' Interest	N	Mean Scores ($\bar{x}$)	Sd	Md	Df	t-cal	t-critical
High Interest	112	15.71	1.95				
				1.11	330	2.83*	1.650
	220						
Low Interest		14.60	2.38				

***Significant; df. = 330; p< 0.05**

Table 3 shows a higher calculated t-value of 2.83 than the critical t-value of 1.650 given 330 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of the significance. This result is significant hence, the null hypothesis is disconfirmed. This implies that there is a significant difference in students' interest in learning English language owing to their scholastic disposition to English language.

4.3 Hypothesis Three: In the null form, the hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in students' perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. To test this hypothesis, independent t-test statistical method was used to analyse the data. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Difference in students' perception of English language learning due to their scholastic disposition to English language

Students' Perception	N	Mean Scores ($\bar{x}$)	Sd	Md	Df	t-cal	t-critical
High Perception	154	12.47	2.89				
				0.81	330	2.56*	1.650
	178						
Low Perception		11.66	3.51				

***Significant; df. = 330; p< 0.05**

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Table 4 shows a higher calculated t-value of 2.56 than the critical t-value of 1.650 given 330 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. This result is significant hence, the null hypothesis is disconfirmed. This implies that there is a significant difference in students' perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the undergraduate students' attitudinal disposition towards English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language in the course of their studying in a Nigerian university. Consequently, the findings showed that there existed a significant difference in students' interest in learning English language and perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. Further, the findings indicated that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language. These findings are in consonant with the earlier studies by Al-Shobani (2016), Qashoa (2006), and Lightbown and Spada, (2006), who in their separate studies discovered that attitudes and motivation represent the factors that prominently affect students' performance of English language learning since they play a prominent role in the success of English language learning.

Specifically, Al-Shobani (2016) reported that students' negative attitudes and no motivation regarding learning the English language can be influenced mainly by wrong beliefs due to surrounding environment such as teachers, studying English just to pass exam, and therefore not working hard. Another reason is the inappropriate pedagogy which focuses merely on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, influenced by the traditional exams, without using English and causes students to face difficulties in retaining, for example, vocabulary and verb tenses. This can lead to frustration and demotivation; as learners feel no need for English and only want to pass exams, which can be achieved easily either by cheating or by having a personal relationship with some teachers. Brown (2007) pointed out that style conflicts between teachers and students and the nature of the classroom activities as a source of demotivation. Further, crowded classroom makes teaching ineffective and students passive.

The role of the teacher is of particular importance in motivating or demotivating the student. This is observed when, for example, a teacher is criticized for not following appropriate and effective language teaching methods or techniques. However, when his learners are asked about that teacher, they tend to praise him for being useful and encouraging, and it also happens that such learners tend to be very successful at the subject taught by such a teacher. If an English teacher, for example, is not friendly, sociable, and encouraging, his/her learners may not have the initiative to participate in learning tasks or activities, which is a crucial factor in the language learning in general and in Nigerian situation in particular as English in the country is both official language of instruction and lingual franca.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained from the study, it can be concluded, therefore, that a significant difference existed in the students' interest in learning English language and perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. Further, the findings indicated that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language significantly influence their scholastic disposition to English language.

Conclusively, all undergraduate students listed ten (10) factors affecting their disposition towards learning English language as: students always forget vocabulary and verbs tenses, absence of encouragement from the teacher, English is not introduced at earlier age, the textbook is not available, the time of the lesson is not enough, they do not speak English at home, students think that English is the language of English people, English is not taught by specialist teacher, English is not used in day life, and students believe that English is difficult. Therefore, all these factors are responsible for students' negative attitude and poor motivation regarding learning English language and thus not working hard towards learning English language in the University.

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made: (i) Teachers should motivate their students to learn better English by highlighting its importance as they need English for their academic achievement; (ii) English teachers should develop a friendly relationship with their students in order to develop a positive attitude towards learning English Language; (iii) Parents and stakeholders in education should live up to their roles in encouraging positive attitude towards learning English Language among undergraduate students; and (iv) An awareness campaign of the importance of English language and the role of English teachers on the part of undergraduate students should be vigorously embarked in all Nigerian university campuses as well as the larger society.

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