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Influence of Comprehension in English Language, Age, Home and School Environments on Students' Achievement in Secondary School Economics in Ibadan

Olopoenia S.F.

Abstract

The study sought to explain the influence of comprehension in English Language, Age, Home and School environments on students' achievement in Secondary School Economics in Ibadan. It was an ex-post facto research, and data were collected in order to answer six research questions. The sample comprised of 1,300 Senior Secondary II Economics Students (730 males and 570 females), drawn from 26 schools in the five Local Government Areas of Ibadan municipality, using stratified random sampling technique. It used four valid and reliable instruments to collect data on the relevant variables. Data collected were subjected to frequency, t-test and multiple regression analyses. The result shows that the level of comprehension in English Language was generally low in all the schools, with only 22.6% obtaining credit or distinction between 1991 and 2002. The study revealed that out of the four predictor variables, comprehension in English Language and age predicted achievement in Economics, and that comprehension in English Language is the most potent contributor to the prediction. Also, age is the next prediction to comprehension in English Language, but its influence is negative; this is to say that the higher the age, the lesser the achievement in Economics, and vice versa. Though the home and the school environments' prediction on achievement in Economics is not significant, it is however positively related to Economics achievement. These findings have implications for policies and strategies on the teaching, learning and evaluation of Economics in secondary schools in Ibadan municipality.

Introduction

Economics came into the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria much later than most other secondary school subjects. Its late coming was because of the controversies over the teachability of the subject by some eminent academics in Great Britain. Notable among them is Robbins (1955) who asserted that Economics is too difficult for secondary school students. Piaget (1969) also argued that Economics involves deduction

and abstract reasoning which does not fully develop before the age of sixteen and that Economics teaching should not be encouraged before that age.

The controversies about the teachability of Economics to secondary school students also caught the attention of some eminent academics in Nigeria, because the country was formerly under the British rule. At the end of the controversies, people in Nigeria accepted Economics into the secondary school curriculum in 1966, because they thought that secondary school students should know something about the economy of the country, and also because of its perceived educational and civic values. Apart from this, another strong case for the introduction of Economics into the secondary school curriculum was because of its extensive application to the daily activities of the students and its interestingness.

Economics was first offered at the West African Examination Council Ordinary Level in 1967 by only ten candidates, who performed brilliantly well. Since then, the number of students' entries into the subject at the W.A.E.C. level has risen tremendously.

The very many uses of Economics in our daily activities, as well as the brilliant performance of the first set of students that sat for the subject at the W.A.E.C ordinary level culminated in the popularity of Economics at the Secondary Schools. In fact, entry in Economics at the WAEC level was on the average of 89.1% of the total entry at WAEC, in the last 12 years (Olopoenia, S. F. 2006). Also, Obemeata (1992) asserted that although Economics is not a compulsory subject as English Language and Mathematics at the secondary school level, it ranks third after these two subjects. This is therefore a clear indication that Economics ranks first among the elective subjects at the secondary school level.

However, in spite of the popularity of Economics as a secondary school subject, and the extensive application to which it can be put in the day-to-day activities of every human being, the emerging trend in the study of the subject is the decline in students' performance in the subject in the School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Obemeata (1992) found out the credit pass of about 35% in 1969-1986 in Economics. The credit pass result in the subject was worst during 1988-1990. An examination of the performance of students at the SSCE in Economics in the last twelve years (1991-2002) showed that the performance is poor (Olopoenia 2006).

In addressing the persistent poor performance in Economics, one needs to look for the causes. Though it has been said that there were

problems of inadequate teachers, non-availability of standard textbooks and appropriate teaching aids when Economics was first introduced in 1966, now, however, those problems no longer exist (Jose 1995). What then is the problem? First, there is the high enrolment in Economics, and few teachers have to face very large number of students in many classes. Secondly, the syllabus to be covered by students seemed to be picked at high level. Thirdly, probably the biggest cause of the poor performances in Economics is the belief that Economics is cheap to pass than other secondary school subjects at the WASCE. 63.3% of Obemeata (1980) sample claimed that economics is cheaper to pass. But analysis of results in the last twelve years did not show this (Olopoenia 2006). The implication of this is that students are likely showing wrong attitude to the study of the subject, and this is probably why most students would not buy textbooks in Economics, and many would not even do homework given by teachers. This wrong attitude will not make them to prepare well for examination, hence high failure rate in Economics at the SSCE level.

A lot of research works have been done on the factors which influence the achievement of students in subject offered in the secondary schools. One of the most important factors is the influence of language of instruction, which is English language in Nigeria. English Language is very important in Nigeria because it is the official language and the language used in all our institutions of learning. It is therefore compulsory for all Nigerian children to learn and make use of it.

But there are problems associated with this. For one, English language is either a second or third language to most students. This is because children are already exposed to their mother tongue or the language of the community before being exposed to English language inside the four walls of the school. Also, Obemeata (1971) adduced two major reasons for the language problems which Nigerian testees encounter in tests of intelligence. Ayodele (1984) asserted that students are poor readers in Nigeria, apart from this, they don't cultivate the habit of reading on their own. To crown it all, Olopoenia (2006) found that there was a trend of poor performance in English Language in 1991-2002. What then do you expect of the performances of students in the subject taught with the language?

Other variables that have been well researched are the home and the school environments' influence on students academic achievement in the secondary schools. Idowu (1991) and Olopoenia (2000) found a very high influence of home environment on academic achievement of

students in Biology and Economics respectively. Adelusi (1980), White Biniaminov and Glasman (1983) and Labo-Popoola (2002) noted a very significant influence of school environments on academic achievement of students.

With this background information, the problem of this study is thus posited.

Statement of Problem

The study sought to find out whether comprehension in English Language, age, home and school environments have any influence on academic achievement in secondary school economics.

Research Questions

Based on the stated problems, the study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Will students with high scores in comprehension in English Language perform better in Economics than those with low scores in comprehension in English Language?
2. Will students with conducive home environment perform better in Economics than students whose home environment is not conducive?
3. Will students in schools with a favourable environment perform better in Economics than those with unfavourable school environment?
4. Will students who are sixteen years and above perform better in Economics than those who are below 16 years of age?
5. What is the relative contribution of comprehension in English Language, home environment, school environment, and age to achievement in Economics?
6. What is the composite effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable?

Literature Review

Many language theorists such as Hones (1970), Obemeata (1976), Ayodele (1984), Adegbite (1996), etc., have found that positive relationship exists between English Language and the subject taught with it. Specifically, Duffy and Roehler (1987), Jacobowitz (1990), Isiugo-Abanihe (1991), Ayodele (2001) etc. have all found out that

comprehension in English Language, is the major cause of failure in English Language and hence failure in any subject taught with it.

Some researchers such as Frazer (1959), Idowu (1991), Salawu (2000), and Olopoenia (2000) have noted that the home environment has a very significant influence on students' achievement. The related variables of consideration in the home environment are the socio-economic status background (SESB) of parents, the parents' aspirations and plan for western education, learning facilities (such as textbooks, notebooks, newspapers, library/reading room), and the psychological feelings and interaction of students in their homes. Students provided with necessary facilities at home, who have good relationship with both parents, have been found to perform better than those with little or no facilities at home.

Reviewed literature also showed that the school environment has a great influence on achievement of students. Researchers such as Heynenyman (1976), Adelusi (1980), Khan and Berstecher (1988), SAME (2000), and Labo-Popoola (2002) are of the view that school environment has a positive influence on the achievement of students. The related variables in the school environment are the student-teacher ratio, student-classroom ratio, availability of well-stocked library, availability of basic amenities (such as toilets, water and good roads), and the aesthetic condition of the school environment.

Finally, age is another variable that has been very much researched into, in order to know its influence on academic achievement of students. Specifically, some eminent academics in Great Britain, such as Robbins (1955) and Piaget (1969), have asserted that Economics involves deduction and abstract reasoning which does not fully develop before the age of sixteen, and that Economics teaching should not be encouraged before that age. Also, Obemeata (1971) and Holden and Danseco (1996) have asserted that age is a very important predictor of academic achievement.

Though many studies have been carried out on these variables as regards their influence on student achievement, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of these entire variables on student achievement in Economics, when taken together. To a large extent, no literature was found on this investigation.

Research Methodology

This study is an ex-post facto research. It sought to determine the influence of English Language comprehension, age, home and school environments on achievement of students in Economics.

The target population of this study comprised all the Government approved public secondary schools in Ibadan municipality. Ibadan municipality comprises five Local Government Areas (LGA) with a total of 85 government approved senior secondary schools. The sample of 1,300 senior secondary II Economics students was selected using stratified random sampling. On the whole, the sample consisted of 730 males and 570 females.

The following four instruments were used in the collection of data on the investigation. They are:

1. English Language Comprehension Test (ELCT)
2. Economics Achievement Test (EAT)
3. Home Environment Questionnaire (HEQ)
4. School Environment Questionnaire (SEQ)

The 'ELCT' was constructed by the researcher with the help of four experienced English Language teachers in the secondary school and two experts in English Language in the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan. The 'EAT' was also constructed by the researcher, with the aid of a pool of objective test items already standardized, trial – tested and administered by the West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C) between the year 1991-2002. The 'HEQ' was adapted from Idowu (1991). The HEQ was designed to collect information on the home environment variables and how each variable affects the cognitive achievement of the students. The 'SEQ' was also constructed by the researcher; it was designed to elicit information on whether a school has a favourable or unfavourable school environment.

The reliability indexes for the instruments were 0.81 for 'ELCT', 0.87 for 'EAT', 0.67 for 'HEQ' and 0.82 for 'SEQ'.

Data collection took place in 26 schools randomly selected from the five LGAs of Ibadan municipality. Data collection was carried out by the researcher and four research assistants, who have been trained in the procedures for administering the instruments through instructions and trial-testing sessions.

One randomly selected intact SSII Economics class was used in each of the 26 schools used in this study. The 'SEQ' and 'HEQ' were the first instruments administered in each of the schools on the first day of

administration. Two other days were used for the administration of the 'ELCT' and 'EAT'. The two tests were not administered on the same day, in order to eliminate the possibility of fatigue that could come in, if students were to sit for two different tests for almost 4 hours. The 'ELCT' lasted 1hour-45minutes, while the 'EAT' lasted 1hour-50minutes. Data collection lasted eight weeks.

Scoring of Instrument

The 'ELCT' is a 100 item objective test in English Language comprehension. Each correct option was 1 mark, the total score was 100 marks, and the average score was 50 marks.

The 'EAT' is a 100 item objective test in Economics. Each correct option was 1 mark, the total score was 100 marks, and the average score was 50 marks.

The 'HEQ' was used to elicit information on the home environment background of each student used as sample. Part I consisting of items 1-11 was used to classify each subject into group, Local Government Area, age and gender. Part II consisting of the responses of subjects on their parents' educational qualification and occupation was used to categorize each subject into either high socio-economic background or low socio-economic background. Subjects whose parents' educational background is less than senior secondary level were classified under low socio-economic background, and those whose parents' educational background is at least senior secondary level and above were classified under high socio-economic background. Part III is on the home environment facilities available. The highest overall score of the 13 'Yes or No' response questions was 26, but the minimum that a subject can have to merit a conducive home environment was 19.5. Hence, any subject with less than 19.5 was categorized as having not-conducive home environment. Part IV consisted of items on the general feelings, experiences, and interactions of the subjects in the home. This part was used to find out the effect of the relationship between the parents and the students on the educational achievement of the student. T-test and multiple regression analyses were used on all the items in part IV.

The 'SEQ' was used to elicit information on the school environment; it was used to categorize the subjects into favourable or unfavourable school environment. The 'SEQ' consists of three sections. Section A was used to classify the subjects into groups and Local Government Area. Section B was used to determine the student-teacher ratio and the student-classroom ratio. The other items 5 - 16 in section

B were used to find out the facilities available in the school. Section C was used to find out the state of the facilities available in each school.

The scores on sections B and C were however added before it was used to determine if a subject has a favourable or an unfavourable school environment. To determine the kind of environment in a school, the minimum score of 15 marks in section B was added to the minimum of 16 marks in section C. A school with at least 31 marks or above was classified as having favourable school environment, while any school with less than 31 marks was classified as having unfavourable school environment.

Statistical Analysis of Data

The descriptive and multivariate statistical techniques were used in analyzing the data collected, based on the six research questions the study was out to answer. T-test was used to answer questions 1 to 4, while multiple regression was used to answer research questions 5 and 6.

Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the data collected are described, with a view to answering the 6 research questions raised in this study. The order of presentation follows the order of the research questions.

Research Question 1

Will students with high comprehension in English Language have a higher score in Economics than students with low comprehension in English Language?

Table 1: Comparison between the Achievements of Students with High Comprehension in English Language with those with Low Comprehension in English Language in Economics

Group or source of variation	No. of cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T cal	T tab	df	Sig
High Comprehension	294	57.80	8.51				
Low Comprehension	1005	39.52	9.06	30.84	1.96	503	** .000

** Statistically significant at .05 level of confidence

An examination of Table 1 shows that subjects with high score in 'ELCT' had a mean score of 57.80, with standard deviation of 8.51, while students with low score in 'ELCT' had a mean score of 39.52, with standard deviation of 9.06. The t-test results indicated that at $\alpha = .05$, the calculated t-value of 30.84 with $df = 503$ was greater than the tabulated t-value of 1.96 with $df = \infty$. Therefore, the result was statistically significant at .05 level of confidence.

Thus, the observed difference in the achievement of subjects who scored high in 'ELCT' and that of subjects with low score in 'ELCT' was statistically significant. The t-test result showed clearly that the students with high comprehension in English Language performed better in Economics than students with low comprehension in English Language.

Research Question 2

Will students with conducive home environment have a higher score in Economics than students with not conducive home environment?

Table 2: Comparison of Achievements of Students from Conducive Home Environment with those from Not-conducive Home Environment in Economics

Group or source of variation	No. of cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T cal	T tab	df	Sig
Conducive Home Environment	606	46.63	12.01				
Not-Conducive Home Environment	692	41.05	10.92	8.76	1.96	1232	** 0.000

** Statistically significant at .05 level of confidence

An examination of table 2 shows that subject from conducive home environment had a mean score of 46.63 with standard deviation of 12.01, while subjects from not-conducive home environment had a mean score of 41.05, with standard deviation of 10.92. The t-test results indicated that at $\alpha = .05$, the calculated t-value of 8.76 with $df = 1232$ was greater than the tabulated t-value of 1.96 with $df = \infty$. Therefore, the result was statistically significant at .05 level of confidence.

Thus, the observed difference in the achievement of the subjects with high 'SES' and those with low 'SES' was statistically significant. The t-test result showed clearly that the students with high 'SES' scored higher in Economics than those with low 'SES'. Also, the observed difference in the achievement of subjects whose parents have high aspiration of western education for their children and that of subjects whose parents have no aspiration for western education was statistically significant. The t-test result therefore showed that students whose parents have high aspiration for their western education scored higher in Economics than those with no aspiration from parents. It was also found out that the observed difference in the achievement of subjects who had available learning materials at home and that of subjects with no learning materials was statistically significant. The t-test result therefore showed that the students who have access to learning materials at home scored higher in Economics than those with no access to learning materials at home. However, the observed difference in the achievement of subjects whose parents live together and those whose parents didn't live together was statistically not significant. The t-test result showed that the students whose parents live together do not perform better in Economics than those whose parents did not live together. Hence, it showed that there was no positive effect of parents living together on the performance of subjects in Economics.

Research Question 3

Will students with a favourable school environment score higher in Economics than those from unfavourable school environment?

Table 3: Comparison of Achievement of Students in Favourable School Environment with those in Unfavourable School Environment in Economics.

Group or Source of Variation	No. of cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T cal	T tab	df	Sig
Favourable School Environment	600	44.79	11.68				
Unfavourable School Environment	699	42.68	11.76	3.22	1.96	1296	** .001

** Statistically significant at .05 level of confidence

An examination of table 3 shows that subjects from favourable school environment had a mean score of 44.79, with standard deviation of 11.68, while subjects from unfavourable school had a mean score of 42.68, with standard deviation of 11.76. The t-test results indicated that at $\alpha = .05$, the calculated t-value of 3.22 with $df = 1269$ was greater than the tabulated t-value of 1.96, with $df = \infty$. Therefore, the result was statistically significant at .05 level of confidence.

Thus, the observed difference in the achievement of subjects from favourable school environment and that of subjects in unfavourable school environment was statistically significant. The t-test result showed that students from favourable school environment scored higher in Economics than students from unfavourable school environment.

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Research Question 4

Will students who are 16 years and above perform better in economics than those who are below 16 years of age?

Table 4: Comparison of Achievements of students who are 16 years and above with those who are less than 16 years of Age in Economics

Group or source of variation	No. of cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T cal	T tab	df	Sig
Age < 16 years	518	47.08	12.00				
Age ≥ 16 years	744	41.39	11.05	8.76	1.96	1044	.000**

** Statistically significant at .05 level of confidence

An examination of table 4 shows that subjects who are less than 16yrs old had a mean score of 47.08, with standard deviation of 12.00, while subjects who are 16 years and above had a mean score of 41.39, with standard deviation of 11.05. The t-test result indicated that at $\alpha = 0.05$, the calculated t-value of 8.76 with $df = 1044$ was greater than the tabulated value of 1.96, with $df = \infty$. Therefore, the result was statistically significant at .05 level of confidence.

Thus, observed difference in the achievement of subjects who are less than 16 years old and those that are 16years and above was statistically significant. The t-test result showed that students who are less than 16years old scored higher in Economics than the students who are 16years and above. This result is contrary to the views of some academics who have asserted that students who are 16 years and above will perform better in Economics than those who are less than 16 years old.

Apart from the two groups classification of age (>16yrs versus < 16yrs) influence on achievement in Economics, a one-way analysis of variance was carried out on the influence of individual age groups on achievement in Economics. It was found out that subjects who are 14 years old had the highest mean in Economics, while age groups from 17 – 20 years had low mean score in Economics. This result probably came out this way, because the older students who are supposed to be in higher institutions, but presently in secondary schools, are likely to be of low intelligent quotient.

Research Question 5

What is the relative contribution of comprehension in English Language, home environment, school environment, and age to achievement in Economics?

Table 5: Relative Contribution of the Independent Variables to the Prediction of Students Achievements in Economics

Variables	Unstandardized	Standard Error (SEB)	Standardized coefficient (BETA)	T	Sig T	Remark
Constant	17.4	2.82	-	6.08	.00**	
ELCT	.81	.02	.77	42.38	.00**	Significant
HOME ENV	.08	.09	-.02	-.92	.36*	Not Significant
SEB	1.34	.49	.05	2.75	.00**	Significant
SCHL ENV	.65	.41	.03	1.59	.11*	Not Significant
AGE	-.36	.11	-.06	-3.29	.00**	Significant

** Significant at .05 level of confidence

* Not significant.

Table 5 gives the summary of the relative contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of student achievement in Economics.

Table 5 is therefore a presentation of the individual contribution of each independent variable, relative to all other variables. The 'ELCT' relative contribution to the prediction of achievement in Economics is .77 or 77%; age has coefficient beta of -.66 or -6%; while school and home environment are .03 and .02 respectively. This result showed that English Language Comprehension has the highest prediction of 77% on achievement in Economics. This means that 77% of achievement in Economics was due to achievement in English Language Comprehension, and could therefore be attributable to the influence of it. Next was the influence of age on Economics, which was -6%. This means that 6% of the achievement in Economics was due to the influence of age, and it is negative because the lower the age, the higher the achievement in Economics, and vice versa. The school and the home environments have 3% and 2% influence on Economics respectively, and they are not significant at .05 level of confidence. This showed that the relative influence of school and home environments on achievement in Economics cannot be reckoned with.

Research Question 6

What is the composite effect of the independent variables on the dependent?

In answering research question 6, student achievement in Economics was regressed on all the four independent variables, and the result is presented in table 6

Multiple R	=	.781
R Square R ²	=	.611
Adjusted R ²	=	.610
Standard Error	=	.348
Analysis of variance		

Table 6: Summary of Regression Analysis on Independent Variables Joint Prediction of Students Achievements in Economics

Source of variation	df	Sum of square	Mean square	F - Ratio	Remarks
Regression	6	110929.69	18488.28	346.78	.00**
Residual	1291	68827.69	53.31		Sig. at
Total	1300				0.05

The result of the regression analysis showed that the independent variables (English Language Comprehension, Age, Home and School environments) have a multiple correlation of 0.781 with student achievement in Economics. Equally, the combination of these variables also explained or accounted for 61% of the variance in student achievement in Economics, as shown by the coefficient of determination of $R^2 = .611$.

The implication of this result is that student achievement in Economics is significantly influenced by the independent variables. Put simply, an improvement in student achievement in Economics is dependent and can be attributable to the combined influence of the independent variables. Furthermore, the result showed that the value of multiple $R = 0.781$ obtained in the study was not due to chance.

Recommendation

The following recommendations and suggestions are hereby put forward as a way of ensuring an effective teaching and learning of Economics in our secondary schools.

1. Economics teachers should make the teaching and learning of Economics interesting by involving the students in the class activities and should use passages in Economics for comprehension exercise during lessons.
2. English Language teachers should involve themselves in the use of the methodology that will help students to understand and have a good grasp of how to comprehend in English Language. Particular attention should be given to the literal, interpretive, and critical aspects of comprehension.
3. Parents should try to make homes conducive for learning by providing educational materials such as textbooks, daily newspapers, economics magazines, and also assist in homeworks, when necessary.

4. Students themselves should take their studies very seriously and do away with the vain belief that Economics is too easy to pass.
5. Government should make school environment in public schools favourable to learning by providing adequate classrooms, qualified teachers, good teaching aids, good and well-stocked libraries, good toilet facilities, regular water supply and accessible roads to all schools.

Conclusion

It could be concluded from the findings of this study that when everyone performs his or her responsibilities in the field of education, there is bound to be improvement in the achievement of students in Economics at the secondary schools. Specifically, when students have good grasp of English Language Comprehension and conducive learning environment is provided both at home and at school, students' achievement in Economics at the secondary school is bound to improve.

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