

Impact of Teachers and Learning Environment Variables on The Academic Achievement in English Language Among Senior Secondary School Students in Delta State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of teachers and learning environment variables on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State. Guided by the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model by Scheerens (1990), which posits that teacher-related inputs and environmental conditions mediate the process of instruction and ultimately shape student output in the form of academic achievement, one research question was raised and three null hypotheses were formulated. The study adopted the Ex-Post Facto design with a sample of 778 students and 84 teachers selected from 467 public senior secondary schools using the stratified sampling technique, with schools stratified by local government area and proportionate random sampling applied within each stratum. Grades of students were extracted from the WAEC broadsheet for 2023, while the Impact of Teachers and Learning Environment Variables Questionnaire (ITLEVQ), a 30-item instrument structured across three subscales measuring teacher qualification, teacher sex, and class size was used to elicit information from teachers. The instrument was validated through expert review by five specialists in Educational Measurement and English Language Education. The reliability of the instrument (Pearson $r = 0.85$) was established using the test-retest method. Mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and independent samples t-test were used for data analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that academic achievement in English Language was generally low, with the majority of students scoring within the C6 grade range and no student recording A1 or B2. The study further found no significant impact of teacher qualification, teacher sex, or class size on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State. It was concluded that these variables do not significantly predict academic achievement in English Language in Delta State. It was recommended among others that government and school administrators should focus on improving the overall quality of instructional delivery and the conditions of the learning environment in order to address the inadequacy in academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Keywords: Teacher qualification, teacher sex, class size, learning environment, academic achievement, English Language.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Education of school-age children appears to be the most important social service the society owes them. This is because education helps people to become better citizens. Through it, the lives of people, particularly the lives of the upcoming generations can be shaped. The Asian School (2018) reveals that education is a tool that provides people with knowledge, skill, technique, and information. The attainment and acquisition of education by the individuals would enable them to understand their rights and duties which make them contribute meaningfully to their well-being and those of their families, society as well as the country.

The acquisition of education is made possible through the agencies of the formal schooling that provides the basic training of children by exposing them to teaching and learning under the guidance of a teacher. In other words, to teach is to engage students in learning. The process entails a teacher's ability to draft students by encouraging them to be actively involved in the construction of the knowledge that is intended to develop them socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Learning can be seen as the process or action through which an individual obtains knowledge or develops abilities through methods such as studying, practicing, or receiving instruction, which may result in a lasting change in behavior. Together, teaching and learning are seen as a process for achieving the education of children taking into consideration what the child is being taught and how he is being taught that will ensure that learning can take place.

Education provides opportunities to learn different types of school subjects. Learning in the English language seems fundamental because it is one of the core subjects in the school syllabus that is compulsory for all categories of learners. Teaching and learning the English language is very important to Nigerian students. This is because the English language is the official language of communication in Nigeria. It is used in government circles; it is used for the transaction of business and trade in everyday commerce; it is used to transmit knowledge in the education sector, the mass media, literature among other spheres of communication endeavours.

Teaching English Language is aimed at achieving several goals, including helping learners become proficient in speaking and writing. Despite the recognized importance of equipping students with usable language skills, difficulties in the instruction and mastery of English remain a concern. Most students presume that English language is a difficult subject. Hence, some would hardly make efforts in learning it. Teachers have also found it difficult coping with the heavy demand required for effective teaching and learning of English language as most parts of the syllabus could not be covered before they are made to sit for the external examination which often results in low achievement in the subject area.

The Language Doctors (2021) identified eleven reasons why English is hard to learn for both teachers and students alike. It says, English language is considered among the most challenging languages to learn because it belongs to families of language; something in it is nonsensical, it contains a lot of rules and exceptions, it involves mastering its writing rules, it has to follow words order, it has a mixed vocabulary, it contains perplexing spelling, it comes with confusing idioms, it is difficult to use plurals and tenses, synonyms are not always synonymous, and people find it difficult to learn English because it has different dialects over different spoken and spelling versions between British and America English.

A list of factors causing poor achievement in English language among senior secondary school students was outlined in a study by Sa'ad and Usman (2014). The authors indicated that dominance of mother tongue, negative attitudes of students towards English language, improper use of the method in teaching English language, inadequate instructional media, and facilities, lack of language laboratory for teaching English language were considered as causes of poor achievement in English language among secondary school students. It was recommended that the right approach to the teaching of English language, engaging of students in debating and listening to English language programmes are some of the ways that can improve secondary school students' achievement in English language. The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model (Scheerens, 1990) provides a useful lens for understanding how school-level variables interact to influence student academic outcomes.

The role of teachers in ensuring that the subject is effectively taught to enable learners to achieve improved academic achievement in English language cannot be ignored. This is because the teacher of English is often held liable whenever students' achievement is low. Also, before a student acquires all these skills, he/she has to develop an interest in the subject. In this regard, the teacher plays a very prominent role in attracting the students' attention by creating interest among the students. A teacher should play various roles such as learner, facilitator, assessor, manager, and evaluator. Before teaching the students, a teacher has to first place himself/herself as a learner and think from the learner's perspective. Once a teacher demonstrates this characteristic, he will be able to win the interest of the students and be able to influence them positively and contribute meaningfully towards improved achievement in their test scores in English language. In other words, the teacher must create an enabling environment for learning to take place.

The learning environment has an impact on the teaching and learning of English language at the secondary school level. This is because, the term refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. A learning environment encompasses learning resources and technology which are means of teaching, modes of learning, and connections to societal and global contexts. The term also includes human behavioural and cultural dimensions, including the vital role of emotion in learning and it requires us to examine and sometimes rethink the roles of teachers and students. By implication, the learning environment is the combination of living things and the physical environment. Learning environments can be grouped into four types: learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. In a learner-centered setting, attention is given to meeting students' individual needs. Knowledge-centered environments aim to ensure students develop a deep understanding of content that can be transferred to different situations. Assessment-centered environments focus on the crucial role of feedback in supporting student progress.

Cox (2019) relates the idea of a learning environment to classroom management. According to this, classroom setup is an important component in a learning environment. He says that it is an essential piece of classroom management to support both teaching and learning. In his opinion, the physical atmosphere of the classroom can help prevent behaviour issues as well as promote improved learning. Therefore, the structuring of the learning environment is essential for teachers and students. He believes that the physical arrangement of the classroom can affect both students' and teachers' behaviour as well. A structured classroom management plan can improve learning and behaviour. He suggested that to create an inviting, safe, supportive learning environment, teachers are to use classroom management to encourage high-performing students through the use of students-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered learning environments respectively.

The connection among students' success, teachers' effectiveness and utilization of facilities in the classroom for learning is associated with class size. According to Ayeni and Olowe (2016), class size refers to the number of students in a given course or classroom, specifically either the number of students being taught by individual teachers in a course or classroom or the average number of students being taught by teachers in a school or educational system. In the Wikipedia, the term is defined to mean the number of students a teacher faces during a given period of instruction.

Class size could be small or large number of students in the context of teacher-students ratio. While a small class size is often encouraged, Weston (2018) observed that large class size often affect the use of instructional materials. He was of the view that class size could limit the use of instructional materials where the class is large. He believes that instructional materials in form of teaching aids and tools could be appropriately utilized when the teacher can easily manage the number of students in his class. It is agreed that instructional materials are most effective when used in classrooms with fewer students.

Therefore, to mitigate the situation, Ujulu, Abah, Kilian, and Hikon (2019) say that the variables that a teacher brings to the English language class learning environment should be positive enough to create a positive learning outcome among students. It is against this background that this study is carried out to establish the extent to which the impact of teachers and learning environment variables determine the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Statement of problem

English Language is a core subject at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria and a compulsory requirement for admission into any tertiary institution. Candidates must obtain a credit pass in English Language at the Ordinary Level before they can enroll for the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination.

A look at achievement among students in English Language in May/June in West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) from 2019 to 2023 indicated inadequacy in the achievement of students in the subject for the period under review. The inadequacy in achievement is worrisome because the percentage credit passes stood at 48.18% in 2019, 46.66% in 2020, 50.54% in 2021, 57.17% in 2022, and 50.06% in 2023 (WAEC, 2023). This inadequacy raises concern about the factors responsible for the inadequacy of achievement of students in the subject. It is assumed that a greater part of the problem is attributable to teacher-related

variables and the environment within which English Language is learned. Teacher variables such as qualification, sex of teacher, and class size are considered significant contributors to student outcomes. Hendrix (2019) found that the learning environment plays a crucial role in students' success, while Liftoff (2021) similarly noted that the learning environment significantly influences achievement in English Language. This study therefore sought to determine the extent to which teachers and learning environment variables impact the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which teachers and learning environment variables impact on the academic achievement in English language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Research question

The following research question was stated to guide the study:

- I. What is the level of academic achievement in English language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Hypotheses of the study

The following null hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance. These are:

- I. There is no significant impact of teachers' qualification on the academic achievement in English language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.
- II. There is no significant impact of the sex of the teacher on the academic achievement in English language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.
- III. There is no significant impact of class size on the academic achievement in English language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Method of the Study

This study adopted the Ex-Post Facto research design. The design was adopted because the study sought to generate data from teacher demographic scale of qualification, years of teaching experience, sex, and location respectively. On the other hand, grades of students in English Language were extracted from WAEC computer broadsheet printouts for 2023 from schools used for the study. The population comprised all senior secondary school students and English Language teachers in Delta State's 467 public senior secondary schools. The stratified sampling technique was applied with the 25 local government areas (LGAs) of Delta State serving as strata. Within each stratum, schools were selected through proportionate random sampling, ensuring representation relative to the number of schools in each LGA. From each selected school, students' WAEC results were extracted from the broadsheet and English Language teachers were purposively selected to complete the ITLEVQ. The ITLEVQ is a 30-item researcher-developed instrument structured into three subscales: Section A (teacher qualification, 10 items), Section B (teacher sex and demographic information, 5 items), and Section C (class size and learning environment conditions, 15 items). Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Content validity of the instrument was established through expert review by five specialists in Educational Measurement and Evaluation and English Language Education, whose suggestions were incorporated before the final version was administered. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method administered two weeks apart on a sample outside the study population, yielding a Pearson r coefficient of 0.85, which was deemed adequate for the study.

RESULTS

Research question 1

What is the level of academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State?

Table 1: Level of Academic Achievement in Senior Secondary School English Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	65-69	36	4.6	4.6	4.6
	60-64	111	14.3	14.3	18.9
	55-59	150	19.3	19.3	38.2
	50-54	325	41.8	41.8	79.9
	45-49	102	13.1	13.1	93.1
	40-44	32	4.1	4.1	97.2
	0-39	22	2.8	2.8	100.0
	Total	778	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 reveals the academic achievement of 778 students in senior secondary school English Language in Delta State. The result shows that 22 students had grade ‘F9’ which represents 2.8 percent. 32 of the students had grade ‘E8’ which represents 4.1 percent. A total of 102 students had grade ‘D7’ which represents 13.1 percent. The number of students that had grade ‘C6’ was 325 which represents 41.8 percent. The students that had grade ‘C5’ was 150 which represents 19.3 percent. A total of 111 students had grade ‘C4’ which represents 14.3 percent. A total of 36 students had grade ‘B3’ which represents 4.6 percents. The Table 1 further reveals that majority of the students in the session under review had grade ‘C6’ while no students had grades ‘A1’ and ‘B2’. The analysis also reveals a mean and standard deviation values of 5.68 and 1.27.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant impact of teacher qualification on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English language in Delta State.

Table 2: ANOVA analysis on teachers’ qualifications in relation to academic achievement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.094	3	1.698	1.162	.330
Within Groups	116.942	80	1.462		
Total	122.036	83			

Table 2 reveals ANOVA analysis on the qualification of English Language teachers in relation to the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. The result reveals F-value of 1.162 and with a P-value of .330. Since the P-value of .330 is greater than the .05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted which shows that is no significant impact of teachers’ qualification on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. The LSD Post Hoc analysis was further carried out and it reveals no significant impact as well.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant impact of the sex of the teacher on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State.

Table 3: t-test of independent sample on the impact of sex of the teachers on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State

	Teachers' Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Academic Achievement	Male	35	4.89	1.301	82	-.045	.964	Not Significant
	Female	49	4.90	1.159				

Table 3 showed a t-test of -.045 and a p value of .964. Testing at an alpha level of .05 the p value is greater than the alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant impact of the sex of teachers on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State is retained. The result indicated that there is no significant impact of the sex of teachers on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant impact of class size on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English language in Delta State.

Table 4: ANOVA analysis on class size in relation to academic achievement

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.511	2	2.256	1.555	.217
Within Groups	117.524	81	1.451		
Total	122.036	83			

Table 4 reveals ANOVA analysis on class size in relation to the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. The result reveals F-value of 1.555 and with a P-value of .217. Since the P-value of .217 is greater than the .05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted which shows that is no significant impact of class size on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. The LSD Post Hoc analysis was further carried out and it reveals no significant impact as well.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Level of Academic Achievement in English Language among Senior Secondary School Students in Delta State

The finding of the research question revealed that the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State was generally low. The majority of students performed within the C grade range, and no student recorded A1 or B2, indicating that achievement was concentrated in the lower pass bands. English Language occupies a central place in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum as both a subject of study and the medium through which all other subjects are learned and examined. Inadequate achievement in it, therefore, carries consequences that extend well beyond the English Language classroom. The findings of this

study agree with the findings of Idoli and Ummonah (2010) who observed that there is a widespread deficit in English Language proficiency among secondary school students in Nigeria, and with Awodun and Oyeniyi (2018) who found that academic achievement in English Language remains generally low, particularly in disadvantaged school environments. The findings also align with the observations of Ola-Busari (2014) who noted that students from developing contexts of Nigeria find it difficult to access tertiary education because of poor achievement in English Language at the end of their schooling. However, the findings disagree with Omochonu (2018) who found that the use of games techniques in teaching oral English produced measurable improvements in students' achievement scores, suggesting that with appropriate instructional strategies, students are capable of performing at higher levels.

The impact of teachers' qualification on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

The finding of hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant impact of teachers' qualification on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted. This implies that teachers' qualification does not predict academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. A possible contextual explanation for this finding is the relative homogeneity of teacher qualifications within the sampled schools, as the majority of sampled teachers held the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) or a Bachelor's degree in Education, leaving limited variance in qualification levels to produce statistically detectable differences in student outcomes. Additionally, having a qualification does not automatically translate into effective classroom delivery; factors such as professional development, motivation, and access to instructional resources may mediate the relationship between qualification and student achievement in ways not captured by this study. The findings of this study disagree with the findings of Dike and Umeobika (2013) whose findings showed that there is a significant correlation between the quality of teachers and the academic achievement of students. Lee and Lee (2018) suggest that teachers' qualification is relevant to the extent that it could influence high performance in the test scores of learners who sit under their instruction. Owolabi and Adedayo (2012) see teacher qualification as the reflection of the training and attainment of a professionally awarded degree certificate in the teaching profession, arguing that higher qualifications equip teachers with the subject-matter depth and pedagogical competence necessary for effective instruction.

The impact of sex of the teacher on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

The finding of hypothesis two on the impact of sex of teachers on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State revealed that there is no significant impact of the sex of teachers on student academic achievement. Since the p-value is greater than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is therefore retained. This implies that the sex of the teacher does not impact on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language in Delta State. A contextual interpretation of this result is that in the Delta State secondary school system, both male and female teachers are subject to the same institutional constraints including overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional resources, and uniform curriculum demands, which may neutralise any gender-related differences in teaching style or effectiveness. This finding redirects attention from demographic characteristics of teachers toward other variables that may be more consequential for learning outcomes, such as the quality of instructional delivery and the adequacy of the learning environment. The result of this finding is related to the finding of Orji, Archibong, Ogbonnaya, and Nkpoyen (2021) whose result showed that teacher gender, when considered individually, does not significantly influence the academic achievement of students. Attah and Ita (2017) similarly found that gender has no significant influence on academic performance in English Language among senior secondary school students. However, the finding disagrees with Blazar and Kraft (2017) whose study found that there is a significant difference attributable to the sex of teachers on students' achievement, and with Abitew, Endalsasa, and Belay (2019) whose study found that female students' academic achievement is shaped by a range of school and societal factors that intersect with gender in complex ways.

The impact of class size on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

The finding of hypothesis three on the impact of class size on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State indicated that class size does not significantly impact on academic achievement. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted. The fact that this variable did not reach statistical significance should not be taken as evidence that class size is not significant. Rather, it may reflect the reality that when overcrowding is nearly universal across a sample, its effects become a constant rather than a variable and are thus absorbed into the baseline conditions of learning. This finding points to an urgent need for structural intervention in class sizes across Delta State. The findings of this study agree with the findings of Owoeye and Yara (2011) which showed that there was no significant difference in the academic achievement of students in small and large classes in Nigerian secondary schools. However, the findings disagree with Blatchford, Moriarity, and Martin (2020) who found that class size is significant to an effective and efficient implementation of the English Language curriculum. Aoumeur (2017) found that large class size has an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, while Spallino (2016) found that noise, congestion, and distraction in overcrowded classes impair student learning outcomes considerably.

Summary of Findings

The following findings emerged from the study:

1. The academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State was generally low, with the majority of students scoring within the C grade range and no student recording A1 or B2.
2. Teacher qualification had no significant impact on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.
3. The sex of the teacher had no significant impact on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.
4. Class size had no significant impact on the academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Delta State.

Based on the findings of this study, it is hereby recommended that:

1. The government should encourage English Language teachers to acquire advanced qualifications through study leave, scholarships, promotions, and salary increments, and should further ensure that these qualifications are matched with practical professional development programmes that translate directly into effective classroom delivery.
2. School administrators should continue to promote equal opportunities for both male and female teachers by encouraging professional development for all teachers regardless of sex, in order to sustain the equitable contributions of teachers of both sexes to the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language.
3. Government at all levels should intensify efforts to enforce policies on manageable class sizes to optimise teacher-student interaction and improve the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in English Language, given that the majority of sampled classes were found to contain 51 or more students.

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