

VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE, CONTENT FAMILIARITY AND ATTITUDE AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN DRAMATIC LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONDO WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ONDO STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and attitude as predictors of students' achievement in Dramatic Literature-in-English in selected secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study adopted the survey research design of the correlational type. Four research instruments were used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis. Findings of the study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge ($r=0.42$, $P<0.05$), content familiarity ($r=0.35$, $P<0.05$) and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English, but there was no significant positive relationship between students' attitude ($r=0.10$, $P>0.05$) and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that teachers should imbibe explicit teaching of vocabulary to improve vocabulary knowledge of the students.

Keywords: Vocabulary Knowledge, Content Familiarity, Attitude, Students' Achievement in Dramatic Literature-in-English

Introduction

Literature is one of the ways in which language functions. It manipulates language for communicative and aesthetic purposes. While language is the medium used in expressing culture, literature is the reflection of this culture. Through the medium of literature, varied messages are communicated in not only extraordinary ways but also in more memorable and aesthetic fashion. Literature, whether oral or written, expresses people's thoughts, feelings, views, culture and values. Thus, literature cannot exist outside language, since language is the medium of expression; people can only use language to compose poems, and write stories and plays. In other words, literature involves the manipulation of language for creative purposes (Abugu, 2010).

Iwabi (2012) defines literature as the study of worthwhile works of imagination with amplitude of language of either serious narrative, poetic and dramatic thought. Literature, whether oral or written, expresses the writer's thoughts, feelings, views, culture, among others. It involves the manipulation of language for creative purposes. Abugu (2010) describes literature as the manipulation and use of gestures and words and phrases for creative purposes. Literature is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction.

Aastha (2010) and Adekoya (2011) opine that literature plays an undeniable role in the development of a child's personality and skills, fosters creativity and strengthens interpersonal skills as well as develops intellectual ability. The use of literature as a vital instrument for moral and intellectual development of the individual and society dates back to ancient times as literature in the forms of poetry, songs, drama or oral prose served as an instrument of entertainment, relaxation and education (Idialu, 2014). Because of its importance in a child's development and its other inestimable values, it is included in the Nigerian school curriculum. Literature has career prospects. It is a prerequisite for admission into higher institutions to study courses such

as Law, Theatre Art, Mass Communication, English and even Literature itself.

Drama is the major concern of this study. Drama, because of its inherent ability to actively engage students emotionally, physically, intellectually, imaginatively, aesthetically and socially, is seen as a way of creating a learner- centred approach to curriculum. Moreover, Drama, like other arts disciplines, provides students with a way of knowing and expressing ideas, perceptions, and feelings. It is a means of self-expression which reduces tension, anger and conflicts as people are able to express themselves. It also serves leisure purpose. Due to modern day societal problems, people no longer have time to relax and know about happenings around them, but through drama, they get to know of happenings in the society. Again, human beings are faced with certain problems in life, but drama provides an opportunity for mental development through critical thinking ability, which enables people to invent things through imagination; this, in turn, is a starting point in breakthrough in many of the problems confronting society.

The aims of dramatic literature at the senior secondary school level are: to relate drama to life by demonstrating how central action is to human experience; to examine the difference between plot and story; to examine the interrelationship and the differences between action in real life and action in drama, and demonstrate the difference between dramatic truth and truth in real life; to introduce and develop “acting” in sketches; to analyse action as a means of demonstrating and understanding elements of dramatic structures, characterization, dramatic irony and setting, and to analyse the use of language in drama.

In spite of the benefit of dramatic literature to students, various examiners’ reports have revealed poor performance of students in the subject cutting across the three genres. The West African Examinations Council’s (WAEC) Chief Examiners’ Report of November/December 2006 on Literature-in-English Paper 2 revealed that candidates did not perform well because of candidates’ lack of seriousness as they opted to read summaries of texts. The reports for May/June 2007 and November/ December 2007 revealed ample traces of the candidates’

having only vague ideas of the content of the set texts while ingrained details were missing.

In May/June 2011, the report shows that students generally did not perform well because of teachers' incompetence and poor approaches to teaching. Also, students' laxity/ non-challant attitude to reading prescribed texts was reported. Nwanze (2014) attributed the poor performance of students in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and other external examinations in the country to shallow knowledge of the subject matter, disregard for rubrics and incorrect interpretation of questions. This, however, means that some professions would soon go into extinction as there will no longer be people to step into the shoes of those who are currently in literature-related professions. It is also suspected that certain variables that could enhance performance are not in place.

In order to reduce students' poor performance in this school subject, researchers have experimented with strategies and variables that could be relevant in the teaching and learning of Literature-in-English but most of these studies have focused on Literature generally and some on prose and poetry (Mohammad, 2001; Olaniran, 2008; Ezenandu, 2011; Akinsulire, 2012; Osisanlu, 2012; Yilmaz, 2012; Araromi, 2013; Kolade-Ojo, 2015) while little attention has been paid to dramatic Literature-in-English. It is therefore necessary to look at variables that could improve the teaching and learning of dramatic literature.

In the teaching and learning of literature, researchers such as Ajao (2001), Afe (2001) and Ajayi (2002) identified ineffective teaching methods, unconducive teaching environment and gender, as factors that could be responsible for students' failure in Literature-in-English examinations as reported in the yearly result of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Adetunji (2004) cited communication patterns in dramatic literature lessons as a cause of the difficulties students encounter in the learning of dramatic literature. He argues that most teachers adopt wrong or stereotyped communication pattern. This has resulted in poor and shoddy delivery of the content of drama lessons (Adediran, 2003).

Onuka and Durowoju (2011) identified availability of learning facilities, students' characteristics, availability of teachers, pupils to teacher ratio and motivation as factors capable of determining the performance level of students in a particular subject or course of study. Tella (2007) asserts that individual student-related variables such as motivational orientations, self-esteem and learning approaches are important factors influencing academic achievement. Scholars are continually making efforts to ameliorate these problems through diverse researches. In addition, the materials needed for the teaching and learning of literature are not available in school libraries, and where there are, they are usually obsolete (Osuntogun, 2007; Akinsulire, 2012).

Furthermore, students perform poorly in examinations because they are unable to grasp the meanings of words that are unfamiliar to them. Limited vocabulary knowledge is a factor that contributes to underachievement among students across content areas. The suggested factors by scholars for students' poor performance have provided bases for scholars to introduce teaching strategies to enhance Literature-in-English learning. However, studies on student-related variables that could predict academic achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English are few.

In spite of the different strategies of teaching and learning Literature-in-English that have been introduced by scholars (Elgar, 2002; Ezenandu, 2011; Akinsulire, 2012; Osisanlu, 2012; Yilmaz, 2012, Nwanze, 2014), results from these findings have not translated to significant improvement in students' performance in the subject. Some of the student-related variables that have been identified in studies as influencing students' achievement are gender, learners' background, self-efficacy, text selection, text utilisation, text availability, locus of control, study habits, vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and attitude (Pandian, 2000; Li, 2012; Yilmaz 2012; Idialu, 2014; Okunade, 2015). Many of the stated student-related variables have been well researched into but the last three (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and attitude), especially in relation to dramatic Literature-in-

English, have not been sufficiently researched in Nigeria. This therefore, necessitated the present study.

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the most essential skills of learning. If a reader does not understand word meanings, understanding content can be very difficult. Typically, students are expected to read a textbook and instantly know what the particular text is talking about. Without knowing what the vocabulary means, students will have difficulty mastering their content material (Fisher, Grant and Frey, 2009; Donnelly and Roe, 2010). Vocabulary or prior knowledge has also been seen as a major factor that influences reading comprehension performance (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Yongqi, 2002; Koda, 2005).

Osuntogun (2007) opines that Shakespearean plays, which are categorised as non-African drama, are recommended to students for reading and because of their nature, many students and teachers alike run away from these plays. The researcher claims that it may be due to their difficulty of language and unsuitability of content. This brings about the relevance of content schema in text comprehension. A content schema is a subject matter framework, without which a reader may struggle to read “between and beyond the lines” via the creation of inferences and the application of new textual information toward novel situations (Snyder, 2013). Content schemata, also termed prior knowledge, background knowledge, or content familiarity, may be further divided into two categories: general knowledge and domain knowledge.

General knowledge includes the information that readers gather through their interactions with the world during every day experiences (Lauer, 2002) while domain knowledge encompasses information about specific fields or content areas (Snyder 2013). Readers frequently encounter both categories of content schemata in the text they read. Familiarity with the content of a text has also been shown to improve recall, the generation of inferences and the acquisition of new information (Linderholm, Gaddy Everson, Van den Broek, Mischinski, Crittenden and Samuels, 2000; Best, Floyd, and

McNamara, 2008), It is believed that a strong knowledge of content material allows a reader to mentally repair breaks in text cohesion and fill gaps in important relationships that may have been omitted in a text. The impact of such a knowledge base on comprehension is powerful. Students have varying levels of prior knowledge, or familiarity, with the content they encounter in text. This prior knowledge includes general knowledge that students have gained from personal experience as well as domain-specific knowledge (Snyder, 2013).

When students read content familiar text, they might have enjoyed the situational interest aroused by the text. Rezaei, Barati and Youhanaee (2012) maintained that when students see elements of their local culture in classroom materials, they feel much more engaged and identify themselves with the context of the text. Such a personal appeal has also been shown as one of the sources of situational interest. Thus, students reading content familiar texts might have found the version much more appealing than content unfamiliar texts, which had no local reference at all. Such an appeal might, in turn, have contributed to higher levels of motivation and thus led to a better reading comprehension (Dörnyei, 2005). Most of the studies on content familiarity were done in reading comprehension (Snyder, 2013; Martinez, 2014). Since literature is an advanced form of reading and past studies have been found to be relevant to students' achievement, the researcher is interested in examining content familiarity in relation to dramatic Literature-in-English.

Attitude is an important construct in the teaching-learning situation. Students' attitude towards Literature-in-English is crucial to their learning and academic achievement in the subject. Students' attitude to a subject has to do with emotional reactions, behavioural tendencies and beliefs about that particular subject, which could be positive or negative (Idialu, 2014). Gök and Silay (2010) define attitude as a mental concept that depicts favourable or unfavourable feelings toward an object. Social psychologists have viewed attitudes as having three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. The cognitive

component is a set of beliefs about an object and its assessment is performed using paper-and-pencil tests. The affective component includes feelings about an object and its assessment is performed by using psychological indices. Finally, the behavioural component pertains to the way in which people act toward an object and its assessment is performed with directly observed behaviours (Salta and Tzougraki, 2004).

Adebiyi (2006) defines attitudes as positive or negative feelings that an individual holds about objects or ideas. Ezeokoli (1998) defines attitude as a person's mental readiness to respond or behave in a particular manner. Attitude can be positive or negative. Students' attitude towards an academic subject is a crucial factor in learning and plays an important role not only in learning but in maintaining a continued interest in the subject (Papanastasiou, 2002). Positive attitude toward school and education is a necessary component for high educational aspirations. Positive attitudes and being highly motivated to read are associated with reading success and more frequent reading. The attitude of students towards any particular subject influences the attention they give to the subject. Those with positive attitude toward reading have a better chance for success in comprehension and beyond.

Literature-in-English is a subject taught in the Nigerian secondary schools because of its numerous benefits. It plays an undeniable role in the development of a child's personality, fosters creativity, strengthens interpersonal skills and develops moral and intellectual ability. However, students have difficulties in the study of dramatic Literature-in-English and these have contributed to their yearly poor performance in Literature-in-English as a subject. As a way of addressing the problem of students' poor performance, researchers have focused their studies on student-centred instructional strategies and methods such as advance organisers, discussion, role play and lecture but examination bodies still record poor performance of students. In order to solve this problem, researchers have shifted their focus to student-related variables such as gender, attitude, self-efficacy, vocabulary knowledge, amongst many others, because they have shown

to be strongly correlated to students' achievement in aspects of English such as reading comprehension, essay and summary writing, and even in other genres of literature but have scarcely been applied to the teaching of drama, especially in Nigeria (to the best of the knowledge of the researcher). It is against this background that this study examined vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and attitude as correlates and predictors of students' achievement in dramatic literature.

The following research questions were answered in this study: What is the nature of relationship among students' vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic Literature-in-English and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English, what is the composite effect (contribution) of the three factors on students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English and What is the relative effect (contribution) of the three factors on students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English?

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design of the correlational type. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 out of the 31 senior secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government, Ondo State. From each of the 20 schools, one intact class was selected for the study. In all, 304 Senior Secondary III students of Literature-in-English participated in the study. SS III students were used as participants because they are currently studying the books used for the study for their forthcoming final examinations. Four research instruments were used for data collection. They are: Dramatic Literature-in-English Achievement Test ($r=0.92$), Vocabulary Knowledge Test ($r=0.76$), Content Familiarity Test ($r=0.81$) and Questionnaire on Students' Attitude to Dramatic Literature-in-English ($r=0.80$). Data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the nature of relationship among students' vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature and students' achievement in dramatic literature in English?

Correlation among students' vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English

Variables	\bar{X}	S.D	R	p	Remark
Achievement in Dramatic Literature-in-English	38.20	18.298	-	-	
Vocabulary Knowledge	62.49	16.625	.424**	0.000	Sig.
Content Familiarity	65.55	15.831	.348**	0.000	Sig
Attitude to Dramatic Literature-in-English	97.76	13.402	.103	.072	Not Sig.

**Correlation Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 1 reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge ($r = 0.42$, $P < 0.05$), content familiarity ($r = 0.35$, $P < 0.05$) and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English, but there is no significant positive relationship between students' attitude ($r = 0.10$, $P > 0.05$) and students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English.

Research Question 2: What is the composite effect (contribution) of the three factors (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature) on students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English?

Composite contributions of the three factors (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature) to students’ achievement in dramatic Literature in English

R=0.442						
R Square=0.195						
Adjusted R ² =0.187						
Std Error of the Est.=16.500						
Model	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean square	F	P	Remark
Regression	19776.775	3	6592.258	24.215	0.000	Sig.
Residual	81672.580	30	272.242			
Total	101449.355	33				

**significant at p<.05

Table 2 shows that the three factors have a positive moderate multiple relationship with students’ achievement in dramatic Literature in English (R = 0.442). The table also reveals an adjusted R² value of 0.19, which implies that the three factors contributed at 19% to the variance of students’ achievement in dramatic Literature in English. The R value of 0.44 is significant (F_(3,300)= 24.22; P<.05). Hence, the R value is not due to chance but as a result of the joint effect of the three factors.

Research Question 3: What is the relative effect (contribution) of the three factors (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature) on students’ achievement in dramatic literature in English?

Relative contributions of the three factors (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity, attitude to dramatic literature) to students’ achievement in dramatic Literature in English

Variable	Unstandardize d Coefficients (B)		Standar dized Coeffici ents			
	(B)	Std. Error				
Constant	4.068	7.421	-	.548	.584	-
Achievement in Dramatic Literature-in- English						
Vocabulary Knowledge	.370	0.071	.336	5.238	.000	Sig.
Content Familiarity	.176	.075	.152	2.345	.020	Sig.
Attitude to dramatic Literature in English	-.005	.073	-.004	-.066	.947	Not sig

Table 3 reveals that vocabulary knowledge made the highest contribution ($\beta=.35$) to students' achievement in dramatic Literature in English, followed by content familiarity ($\beta=.15$) and attitude to dramatic Literature in English ($\beta=-.04$).

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English. The finding of this study corroborates the findings of the Moje and Tysvaer (2010) that vocabulary knowledge is highly correlated with reading comprehension and academic success. It is consistent with the findings of Okunade (2015) and Oyelakin (2015) that vocabulary knowledge has a positive relationship with achievement. This finding negates the findings of Li (2012), Fasan (2012) and Ogunnowo (2013)

that attitude has a positive and significant relationship with students' achievement.

Table 2 shows that there is a significant composite effect (contribution) of the three factors (vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and students' attitude) on students' achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English. This implies that the three factors taken together can improve achievement. This finding supports the findings of Tabatabaei and Shakerin (2013) who reported that sufficient content familiarity permits the deployment of suitable skills and strategies to comprehend a text and that content familiarity has important effects on the students' comprehension performance and that when students are familiar with the content, their performance in a test is better than when they are not familiar with content. This finding is against the studies of Linderholm, et al (2000) and Best, Floyd and McNamara (2008) who revealed that there was no significant composite contribution of vocabulary knowledge, content familiarity and students' attitude on students' achievement.

Table 3 shows that vocabulary knowledge made the highest contribution. It supports with the findings of Okunade (2015) and Oyelakin (2015) that vocabulary knowledge contributes to achievement. This is further corroborated by the report of Roche and Harrington (2013) that vocabulary knowledge contributes to students' achievement. Vocabulary knowledge is said to also increase achievement as students will be able to absorb content better (Fisher, Grant and Frey, 2009). It is inconsistent with the claims of Papanastasiou (2000), Oyinloye and Ajayi (2011) that a student's attitude towards an academic subject is a crucial factor in his or her academic achievement.

Conclusion

Vocabulary knowledge and content familiarity were found to be positively related to achievement in dramatic Literature-in-English. They are essential factors in the learning and teaching of dramatic

literature. Teachers should, therefore, adopt methods and strategies that enhance vocabulary knowledge and content familiarity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should imbibe explicit teaching of vocabulary to improve vocabulary knowledge of the students.
2. Teachers should be resourceful in the teaching of drama by providing materials that will stimulate background knowledge of the students in literature classes.
3. Teachers should provide and encourage students to do extensive reading beyond the classroom requirements. When students do extensive readings, they will be able to build new vocabulary as well as background knowledge in multiple subject matters. The development of vocabulary and background knowledge will in turn help students with their reading comprehension.
4. Students should read articles and supplementary notes to support the teacher's notes, and also, listen to programmes on radio and television.
5. School authorities and the government should make available, in school libraries, literature texts that are relevant to the social and cultural environment of the students.
6. Curriculum developers should recommend texts that could stimulate students' background knowledge.

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