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INFLUENCE OF STUDY SKILLS ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NSUKKA URBAN AREA OF ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:The study investigated the influence of study skills on academic achievement of senior secondary school students. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A structured study skills inventory (SS1) consisting of 29 items, and a standardized English language achievement test (EAT) were administered to 400 SSIII students (200 boys and 200 girls) in Nsukka urban area of Enugu state, Nigeria. The data collected were presented using mean scores and standard deviations. The t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 probability level. Findings indicated that study skills had a significant influence on students' academic achievement; students' academic achievement was significantly influenced by gender; the males students had a higher mean score than their female counterparts. It was recommended that students, teachers, parents and guidance counselors should be abreast of the most effective study skills and work in tandem to improve both school and home study environments of students.

Keywords: academic achievement , Achievement , educative process , mathematics.

INTRODUCTION:

Achievement is central in the educative process. It is a major indices of the extent educational objectives were realized. Suin (2011) defined achievement as the outcome of what an individual has learned from some educational experiences. To Isnian (2009) achievement is a measure of an individual's standing on an educational activity. Academic achievement is commonly measured by tests and examinations. Academic achievement is a mark of success for both students and teachers. In recent times, in Nigeria, there has been a decline in academic achievement of students in public examinations especially in English language and mathematics. For instance, Uwadie (2010) reported that only 24.94 percent of the candidates who sat for the May/June 2010 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), made five credits including English language and mathematics. This represents 337, 071 of the 1,278,843 candidates whose results were released. In 2009, only 25.99 percent made five credits including English language and mathematics, while in 2008 it was 13.76 percent, and 2007, 22.54 percent.

The negative scenerio calls for urgent attention. Identifying factors influencing students achievement is an important quest for teachers and topical for many educational researchers (Eggen & Kanchak, 1999). It may be possible that poor academic achievement among secondary school students in Nigeria could be influenced by study skills, gender and other cognitive variables not adequately addressed by educational research.

According to Crede and Kuncel (2008) study skills refers to student's knowledge of appropriate study strategies and methods, and the ability to manage time and other cognitive resources to meet the demands of academic tasks. Likewise, study skills are defined as techniques and strategies that help a person read and listen for specific purposes with the intent to remember (Richardson, Robnolt & Rhodes, 2010). Study skills include a range of cognitive skills and processes that increase how effective and efficient a student learns. (Gettinger & Siebert, 2002). Similarly, a study strategy is the over all approach to selecting the best tactics for studying (Richardson, Robnolt, & Rhodes, 2010: Gettinger & Sibert, 2002).

Dunn (1991) viewed study skills as the way in which a learner begins to react, process and retain information in a learning situation. It is a combination of many biologically and experientially imposed characteristics that contribute to effective learning. Broadly, any skills which boost a person's ability to study and pass examinations can be termed a study skill (Hills and Benlow, 2008). There are ways a student can study to increase their

ability to retain information and to think critically. They include mnemonics, effective note-taking, effective time management, summarizing, use of key words and others. There are also several other methods of studying such as memorization, communication skills, flash card training, condensing information, summarizing, use of key words, acronyms, organizations and life style changes (Parker, 2010), which become internalized as study skills.

Mehta, Malhorta & Jerath (1989) studied the psychological correlates of academic achievement at school level. They reported a positive and significant correlation between study skills and academic achievement. Verma (1996) studied the effect of study skills on achievement among 500 students of X class. The study revealed significant independent effect of study skills on achievement. Aluede and Onolemeln (2001) studied the effect of study skills counseling on the academic achievement of senior secondary students in English language. The findings of the study revealed that counseling students on good study skills can bring about improvement in the students academic achievement.

Gender has also been highlighted by different researchers with reference to the study skills literature. Wolters (1999) reported that learning strategies used by girls were superior to those of boys. Zimmerman and Martinez-pons (1990) reported that girls were better than boys in self monitoring, goal setting, planning, and structuring of their study environment whereas Coley (2001) found girls to also be significantly better than boys in reading and writing. The focus of these studies had been on the influence of study skills on other related variables. However, students' strategies and approaches to learning also can be expected to influence their achievement levels. Also gender, a culturally ascribed cognitive variable may differentially impact on academic achievement of male and female students especially in predominantly male dominant cultures as found in Nigeria. Not much can be found in literature on the cognitive variables that impact on students' academic achievement especially Nigerian students.

The Problem

There has been an increased out cry regarding the observed apparent decline in the quality of Nigerian educational system. Many Nigerian students at all levels record poor academic achievements especially in public and national examinations. This in several occasions has been blamed on their lack of preparedness for such tests or inadequacy of learning skills. This anomaly has often resulted in increased proneness to test anxiety and observable increase in sharp practices to circumvent established testing rules and conditions in public examinations. It is also not quite clear how study skills and gender have influenced academic achievement among secondary schools students in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:
1). What is the influence of study skills on academic achievement of secondary school students?
2). What is the influence of gender on academic achievement of secondary school students?

Hypotheses

H01 Study skills as measured by study skills inventory (SSI) have no significant influence on academic achievement of secondary school students in Nsukka Urban of Enugu State, Nigeria.
HO2 The influence of gender on secondary school students academic achievement is not significant.

Methodology

The study was executed using an ex-post factor research design. The population of the study was all the senior secondary class III students SSIII in Nsukka Urban, Nsukka local government area of Enugu state, Nigeria. The sample was 400 students (200 boys and 200 girls) drawn from five schools within the Nsukka Urban. Two sampling techniques were employed in composing the sample. First, five secondary schools were sampled from the twelve secondary schools in the area, using simple random sampling technique. Second, stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the students into males and females. From each of the schools sampled for the study, 80 students were composed (40 males and 40 females). The instrument used for the study was a 29 – item study skills inventory (SS1) developed by the researchers. The items sought information on study skills of the subjects. The second instrument was English language achievement test (EAT) adopted from the standardized West African Examination Councils (WAEC) past question paper.

The EAT consists of paper one, requiring the respondent to compose a letter or a story, respond to questions on a comprehension passage, and summarize a passage; and paper two which is a 100 –multiple choice items question covering ordinary level English Language lexis and structure. Maximum marks obtainable in both papers is 100. English Language achievement test is selected because achievement in it is mandatory for university matriculation in Nigeria.

Items on the SS1 were rated on four-point response options of: Always (4); sometimes. Rarely (2); Never (1). The rating was reversed for negatively skewed items. Two experts in educational psychology and a psychometrician in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka face-validated the SS1. The internal consistency estimate obtained for SSI using Cronbach alpha was 0.72. Data were presented using means and standard deviations. The t –test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 probability level.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviations of good and poor study skills respondents on English language achievement test.

Study skills	Mean	SD	N
Good study skills	48.9	16.3	184
Poor study skills	45.3	11.4	216

t-cal= 9.57; t crit = 1.96; df = 398

Data in Table 1 show that students with good study skills had a mean score of 48.9 and a standard deviation of 16.3 while their counterparts with poor study skills had a mean score of 45.3 and a standard deviation of 11.4. The students with good study skills had a higher mean score than those with poor study skills. The t-test result show that study skills significantly influenced achievement of secondary school students. The null hypothesis of no significant influence of study skills on students' academic achievement was therefore rejected.

Table 2: Mean rating and standard deviations on the influence of students' gender on achievement in English language

Gender	Mean	SD	N
Male	48.7	15.0	200
Female	41.60	8.07	200

t cal = 4.52; t crit = 1.96; df = 398

Data in Table 2 revealed that male students had a mean score of 48.72, and a standard deviation of 15.0, while the female students had a mean score of 41.60 and standard deviation of 8.07. Mean score of males in the achievement test was higher than that of females. The t-test result shows that the null hypothesis of no significant influence was rejected.

DISCUSSION

It has been shown in this study that study skills had a significant influence on academic achievement. The findings of this study support the findings of Verma (1996) that study skills had a significant independent effect on academic achievement. The result suggests a direct proportional impact of study sills on academic achievement of students. The findings of this study also support the findings of Mehta, Malhorta & Terath (1989) who reported a positive and significant correlation between study skill and academic achievement. It has also been shown in this study that gender had a significant influence on students' academic achievement. The males had a higher mean score in the achievement test than their female counterparts. The findings do not support the findings of Coley (2001) who reported that girls were significantly better than boys in reading and writing. These findings are in tandem with the increased global quest for the factors that could improve academic achievement. The implications of this study is that students, teachers, parents and guidance counselors should be abreast of the most effective study skills as it has been found to have influence on academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

It was shown in this study that study skills had a significant influence on academic achievement. Academic achievement is the focal point of any educational objective. Gender significantly influenced academic achievement. Therefore, gender sensitivity is to be observed as a conscious classroom management skill.

It is recommended that students be oriented in the basic learning skills. Learning environment conditions should be made to optimize the skills and opportunities irrespective of gender differences in other critical school learning activities that impact on students academic achievement.

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