ATTITUDE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS TOWARDS AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE

Rose J. MUSA (PhD)
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, University of Benin, Benin City
roselynmusa@yahoo.com

&

Augustina I. ERHIVWODE
Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, University of Benin, Benin City

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Attitude of English Language Teachers towards the use of Authentic Assessments methods in selected Senior Secondary Schools in Delta State. To achieve this, two research questions were raised, and one hypothesis was formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. Descriptive Survey design was adopted. Population for the study comprised four hundred and forty nine (449) English Language teachers from one hundred and sixty one (161) Senior Secondary Schools in Delta Central Senatorial District. Stratified and purposive Sampling techniques were used to select the sample size of ninety – nine (99) English language teachers. Test of Attitude of English Language Teachers to Authentic Assessment (TAETAA) was developed by the researchers and used to collect data for the study. Literature was reviewed appropriately and the instrument validated by experts of English Language. The instrument was pilot tested on a sample of twenty English Language teachers who were not part of the main study. A reliability coefficient of 0.86 on attitude was obtained using Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient statistics. The data obtained from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics to answer research questions one and two, while t-test was used for the only hypothesis at the 0.05 significance. From the results, the researchers found that English language teachers were favourably disposed to authentic assessment and that with good mastery of the subject matter, teachers gain and retain their students' attention. The study concluded that if given the opportunity to use it in their language classes, they would efficiently utilize it to enhance students' performance in the subject area. It was recommended that with the positive attitude towards authentic assessment, teachers should be encouraged to assess and evaluate students' English language abilities and competencies, using authentic assessment in their language classrooms to improve learning.

KeyWords: *Teachers, attitude, authentic, assessment, gender, English language*

Introduction

English Language is one of the top ten (10) most used and spoken Languages in the world. It has a total of three hundred and sixty (360) million native speakers. About half a billion people speak English as a Second Language (L2), showing its remarkable success as Lingua Franca of business, travel and international relations. English is synonymous with opportunities and better quality of life worldwide James, (2018). In Nigeria, English Language was introduced by the early missionaries and the colonial administrators as far back as in the 1842. At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited English Language as her official language. She adopted English language as language of education, politics and of the immediate environment (National policy on Education, 2013), Section 3, No 17. English Language is a necessary requirement for educational advancement.

Overtime, it has been observed that students have not been performing well in English Language in their Certificate Examinations, like, West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). Onukaogu (2002), Alegbeleye (2008), state that students' performances in English have been on the decline and that their performance is simply disheartening.

For instance, the statistics of students' performance between 2005 and 2011, Olufunke, (2012) and between 2010 to 2017, Source, West African Examination Council (WAEC) 2017, all reveal poor students' performances in English Language. Without a credit pass in English Language, no further education is possible, (Sogbetan, 2006). This situation is worrisome since all the teachers are qualified graduates. The students' poor performance in English Language is attributed to a number of reasons, other than teachers' qualifications. Such reasons include: Content knowledge of subject matter, attitudes of teachers and assessment methods used by teachers and so on. Teachers play leading roles in the teaching and learning processes. Their experience, motivation and assessment of learning outcomes contribute in making them one of the primary determinants of students' academic and lifetime achievements (Abimbola, 2004; Ayodele & Adegbile, 2007). Poor mastery of subject matter by teachers causes students' loss of interest and eventual failure of the subject.

Assessment of Learning refers to strategies designed to confirm what students know, demonstrate whether or not they have met curriculum outcomes. It is used to certify proficiency and make decisions about students' future programmes or placements. Assessments are normally designed to provide evidence of achievements to parents, other educators, and students and sometimes to employers of labour and other educational institutions (Ghaicha, 2016). It is important that the underlying logic and measurement of assessment of learning be credible and defendable since it is essential to decisions about the students' future. On teachers then, lies the responsibility of reporting students' learning accurately and fairly, based on evidences obtained from a variety of contexts and applications. Good Assessment helps teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, provides them a frame work to fine-tune teaching methods, it allows teachers the opportunity to monitor students' progress and academic achievement, determines the performance level of individual students in an effort to improving students' academic successes. When assessment of learning is not properly carried out, it affects students learning outcomes. For learning and assessment are two sides of the same coin, they complement each other. Assessment is a powerful lever that can either boost or undermine students' learning and academic success.

Assessment of learning is one of the most important aspects of teaching and learning English Language. Some of the obstacles to effective assessment of English Language are the lack of expertise, conceptual knowledge and vocabulary effectiveness by teachers (Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012). Some teachers have the prerequisite teaching qualifications but still lack the skills to assess students' learning properly. Studies have shown that students' academic achievements are linked to the assessment methods used by teachers in the language classrooms. It is therefore very important that a teacher should have adequate knowledge of what to teach, how to teach, and how to assess students learning outcomes. The issue of English Language assessment has continued to generate a lot of attention from education stake holders. The assessment debate revolves round the traditional versus alternative types of assessment. There is a need therefore to find an effective balance in assessment procedures in the language classroom. English Language teachers have to equip themselves with these new assessment methods in order to enhance students' learning. Assessment is fairer to students if they are allowed to demonstrate their skills in multiple ways with different tests, different methods and different question formats. There are different types of assessment methods which include the following: Formative assessment, Summative assessment, diagnostic assessment, dynamic assessment, criterion referenced assessment, authentic or work integrated assessment and so on.

In recent times critics have raised concerns as to the usefulness of formal assessment as the primary measure of students' achievement (Butterfield, William & Marr, 1999). Due to these criticisms there is a shift now from the formal assessment methods to more authentic assessment methods which assesses students using practical and meaningful tasks and attributes. The increased interest in authentic assessment is based on the fact that the traditional assessment methods do not assess the full range of essential student outcomes. Authentic assessment is a task or performance based assessment. The assessment tasks and conditions are closely related to what students would experience within employment in work places later in life. The tasks are related to real world situations of experts in the field. This type of assessment is designed to develop students' skills and competences alongside academic development. It is collaborative in nature, and allows students the opportunity for self assessment. It tests Students' individual abilities based on what they have been taught. (Wiggins 1989:703). Authentic assessment evaluates learning objectives in innovative and appropriate ways, making use of practical daily-life activities instead of hypothetical test items. It directly assesses students' mastery of certain knowledge and skill. It makes students play active roles in the teaching and learning process. It is a student centered approach, while teachers play the roles of: toolmakers, providers, observers and joint interpreters of evolving conversational experiments Harri-Augstein & Thomas, (2013). Authentic assessment prepares students for the 21stcentury competences. The mastery of the 21st century competences will in no small measure enable students to succeed in colleges, thrive in a fast changing global economy and so live meaningful lives in a complex, technologically connected world, Indiana Department of Education Publication, (2016). Assessing language learners in a genuine authentic and on going manner in a Second Language (ESL) classroom is very important and necessary. This will ensure students' academic successes in their certificate examinations. However, it is not certain that Language teachers in Nigeria, Delta State in particular are aware of the importance of and usefulness of authentic assessment in the language classroom.

Furthermore, teacher's attitude is of great importance in teaching and learning of English language. Attitude can influence a person's performance either positively or negatively. Similarly attitude could affect how well a teacher plans, prepares, delivers his or her lessons and assesses his or her students as well. Consequently, the attitude of a teacher consciously or unconsciously greatly impacts on students' academic performances. Teachers' attitudes in no small measure influence students' interest in learning (Omolara & Adebukola, 2015). Personality traits of a teacher are more powerful and influential than the course content or instructional strategies he or she may employ in the classroom.(Agness, 2003). Teachers with good professional competence and interpersonal skills are much more effective in their classrooms in terms of Students behaviours, better understanding of concepts, positive disposition and general mental alertness by learners.

Moreover, there has been much debate on gender differences on students' academic performance, studies have shown that teachers' attitudes towards authentic assessment differ significantly according to gender variable. Ismail, (2018) in his study of gender variable shows different results, considering the average mean values; the significant difference is determined to be in favour of female teachers. However, Kinay and Han, (2017) in their studies have not found any significant difference in the teachers' belief in authentic assessment in terms of gender. However, Ibe, Nworgu and Anyaegbunam, (2016) found that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female teachers in their studies. Although, in some other studies, researchers findings are quite contrary, for instance, Erdamar, Aytac, Turk and Arseren (2016:453) in their studies found that the effect of gender on attitudes of pre - service teachers towards teaching profession is that female teachers' attitudes towards their profession are more positive compared to their male counterparts. Thus, the attitudes of female teachers may be positively influenced towards authentic assessment as it requires patience to observe and assess the students' academic development overtime.

Statement of the Problem

English Language is Nigeria's official language for education, commerce and governance yet students perform poorly in it in their certificate examinations. One would have expected that students would perform well in English giving the fact that it is Nigeria's Second Language (L2) and extensively used for instruction in schools. The Chief Examiners WAEC report over the years indicated a steady decline in students' performance in English Language. For instance, the results between 2005 and 2011 were so poor according to Olufunke, 2012. Those of 2012 to 2017 were equally not impressive according to the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) 2017 report.

The problem here therefore is the inability of most students to pass English Language Successfully. Could this poor performance be as a result of the traditional assessment method used by teachers to assess their learning outcomes? If this is the case, how then can we bridge this gap between language assessment method and students academic achievements? This study seeks to fill this vacuum by introducing an innovative alternative and more efficient assessment method known as "Authentic Assessment (AA). Studies have shown that this assessment method has proved to be a remarkable success in improving students' academic achievements especially in the language classrooms. Authentic assessment is a task or

performance based assessment which prepares students for the real world and work place experiences. Authentic assessment does not seem to have gained popularity in Nigerian Schools yet. Many English Language teachers are not known to use authentic assessment in their language classrooms. So it has not received the much required attention in Nigeria. To the knowledge of the researcher, there is no study which has investigated English Language Teachers Attitudes towards the use of Authentic Assessment in Nigeria let alone in Delta Sate.

This study is designed therefore to investigate and verify the level of Attitudes of English Language Teachers towards the use of Authentic Assessment methods in Senior Secondary Schools in Ethiope West and Sapele Local Government Areas in Delta Central Senatorial District.

Research Questions

To aid the objectives of the study, the following research questions were generated.

1) What is the English Language teacher's attitude towards the use of Authentic Assessment?
2) Is there any difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards Authentic Assessment based on Gender?

Hypothesis

Research questions 1 was answered directly while question 2 was hypothesized thus:

1) There is no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards Authentic Assessment based on Gender.

Method

The population for this study comprised all the four hundred and forty-nine (449) English Language teachers from one hundred and sixty-one (161) Senior Secondary Schools in Delta Central Senatorial District. However, the researchers by means of a purposive sampling technique selected for the study, a sample size of ninety-nine (99) English Language teachers from Sixty Senior Secondary Schools in both Ethiope West and Sapele Local Government Areas of Delta State.

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The Survey research design was used because the study involves a systematic gathering of information from respondents for the purpose of describing the attitude of the population from which samples are drawn. Survey research is usually used for investigating human behaviours, perceptions, feelings and opinions of people. It is most appropriate for the study as the researcher is concerned with finding out teachers' attitudes towards the use of Authentic Assessment in Senior Secondary Schools in Delta Central Senatorial District.

A test of Attitude of English Language Teachers towards the use of Authentic Assessment (TAETAA) was the instrument used to collect data for the study. The researchers' self-developed instrument consisted of two sections. Section A contained items which enabled the researchers to elicit the socio-demographic information of the respondents such as gender, years of teaching experience, name of school and location (rural or urban), Local Government Area and academic qualifications while Section B in the four point Likert scale of 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree', allowed the teachers to tick (√)the right

options on test items that elicited information on the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Authentic Assessment.

Research question 1 was not hypothesized; it was answered directly using descriptive statistics. The acceptable mean was 2.5. This was obtained thus: SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1 = (4+3+2+1)/4 = 2.5. Any teacher who scored below 2.5 was regarded to have low level attitude to Authentic Assessment while those who scored 2.5 and above were seen to have high level attitude to Authentic Assessment. The only hypothesis raised was tested, using independent samples t-test at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of English Language Teachers' Attitude towards the use of Authentic Assessments?

Table 1: Mean Analysis of English Language Teachers' Attitude towards the use of Authentic Assessment.

Respondents:	N	Sum	Mean Cal.	Benchmark	Decision
Teachers:	99	501600	5.02	2.50	Very high.

Data generated as shown on table 1 revealed that calculated mean was 5.02 and the theoretical mean which was the benchmark was 2.50.This indicated that English Language teachers' attitude towards the use of Authentic Assessment were very high.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards Authentic Assessment based on gender.

Data collected to test the only hypothesis were analyzed using independent sample t-test. The result of the analysis is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: t-test of Attitude of English Language Teachers towards Authentic Assessment Based on Gender.

GenderN	Mean	S Dt	df	Sig.(2.tailer)	Remark	
Males	19	50.11	3.02	-.7.5	97	.46	Retained
Females	80	50.80	5.58			

Table 2 showed the mean score of the male teachers as 50.11 with a standard deviation of 3.02, while the mean score of the female teachers stood at 5.80 with a standard deviation of 5.58. To find out whether the difference in the means was significant, the t-test for independent samples was conducted. The table further showed a t-value of –7.5 significant at.46 alpha level, which was greater than the significant level of 0.05. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards authentic assessment based on gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

Findings

Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance and the results obtained from the study showed that:

1. The level of the attitude of English Language teachers towards the use of authentic assessment was very high.
2. There was no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards the use of authentic assessment based on gender.

Discussion

This study revealed that English Language teachers have very high level attitude towards authentic assessment with the mean score of 5.02 and are favorably disposed to using it in their classes if included in the curriculum. This positive attitude agreed with Omolara and Adebukola (2015) that teachers' attitudes highly influence students' interest in learning. Aggarwali (2001) also asserted that an intelligent teacher with good mastery of his subject matter always commands respect and gain students' attention during the teaching and learning process.

The hypothesis that "There is no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards Authentic Assessment based on gender" was retained. The result of the study showed that there was no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards authentic assessment based on gender. The hypothesis was retained because from the data analyzed, result indicated a t-value of -75, which was significant at 46 therefore not significant at 0.05 alpha level. Though the mean ratings of the female teachers were higher than the male teachers, the difference was not significant. Therefore the null hypothesis was retained as stated that 'there is no significant difference in the attitude of English Language teachers towards Authentic Assessment based on gender'. This finding corroborated the findings of Kinay and Han (2017) who found no significant difference in teachers' belief in Authentic Assessment in terms of gender, but contrary to the findings of Erdamar et al (2016) who in their studies found significant differences in favour of female pre-service teachers' attitude towards their occupation.

Conclusion

This study investigated the Attitude of English Language teachers towards the use of Authentic Assessment in selected Senior Secondary Schools in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that the teachers had very high positive attitude towards the use of authentic assessment and that teachers' gender did not significantly influence their attitude towards the use of Authentic Assessment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn there from, the following recommendations were made with a view to improving and facilitating learning and assessment of English Language in schools:

1. It was recommended that curriculum planners should revisit English Language curriculum with a view to include the usage of authentic assessment forms.
2. Since Teachers have displayed positive attitude towards authentic assessment, they should be encouraged to assess and evaluate their students' English language abilities and competences, using authentic assessment in their language classrooms to improve their learning. Consequently, students should not only be exposed to traditional methods of assessment but also to authentic assessments.
3. Workshops, seminars and refreshers' courses should be organized for English Language teachers regularly to intimate them on the current methods for administering authentic assessment.
4. Universities and Colleges of Education might need to modify their teacher training programmes to re-orientate teachers towards the student centered assessment technique.
5. Textbook writers should use authentic assessment materials in the question section of their text books so as to encourage English Language teachers to utilize authentic assessment in their classrooms.
6. Finally, the different examination bodies in Nigeria should test the English Language using authentic assessment despite the cost as this will encourage its use in classrooms. If authentic assessment is not used by these examination bodies in Nigeria in setting their questions, teachers may not see the need use it.

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