

CAUSAL FACTORS OF CHALLENGES OF MASTERING CONCORD OF ENGLISH AMONG STUDENTS WITH OR WITHOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES IN IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Challenges encountered by students with or without learning disabilities in mastering concord of English in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria necessitated this study. Random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used in the selection of one hundred and fifty (150) senior secondary class one participants from four Senior Secondary Schools in Ibadan. The sample consisted of 42 (28%) students with learning disabilities and 108 (72%) students without learning disabilities. Likewise, there were 58 (38.7%) males and 92 (61.3%) females. Two research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of the study. Screening for learning disabilities was done using a standardized scale tagged Learning Disability Evaluation Scale Re-normed Second Edition (LDES-R2). Following identification of students with and without learning disabilities, a self-designed questionnaire tagged “Causal factors questionnaire” was used to collect data from the participants. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The finding shows that school factors had the greatest contribution of 26.9% ($\beta = 0.269$, $t = 2.738$, $P < 0.05$). This is followed by parental factors with 20.0% ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 2.600$, $P < 0.05$). Then, this is followed by students’ factor with a contribution of -26.6% ($\beta = 0.266$, $t = 2.948$, $P < 0.05$). Teachers’ factors had the least contribution of -19.6% ($\beta = 0.196$, $t = 1.928$, $P > 0.05$). On the basis of the findings, this study recommends that to bridge the gap between students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities in the learning of English concord, small class size and collaboration between regular teachers of English Language and specialists in learning disabilities should be encouraged.

Key Words: students, learning disabilities, challenges, causal factors, mastery, English concord

Introduction

English language is a core school subject and it is spelt out to be used progressively right from primary four as a medium of instruction according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), National Policy on Education. It has many aspects such as oral English, grammar, comprehension and summary, essay writing and letter writing. In specific terms, English grammar refers to rules and regulations that govern English Language. It is the structural set down principles that must be followed before acceptable and meaningful expression can be made. It has many aspects such as tenses, parts of speech and concord.

Concord of English is an agreement between a verb and a subject. Babajide (1998) asserts that for two people to work or live happily together, they need some degree of cooperation and agreement. As people do, so parts of sentence do in order for the sentence to be grammatically correct. Olabode (2006) describes concord as the technical term used to denote formal agreement in person, number, gender or tense between different elements within a sentence. This agreement is shown in changes in the verb form. For example, verbs agree with their subjects in number and person. Thus, a singular subject normally takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb. Some nouns are plural in nature and they take plural verbs. Some examples of such nouns are police, people, remains, minutes and thanks. The non-countable nouns concur with the singular forms of verbs. Using them with the plural verbs

constitutes some errors in sentences (Eyisi, 2004).

Kolawole and Adelabu (2004) identify three aspects of concord: grammatical, notional and proximity concord. Grammatical concord is the agreement of subject and verb according to number, person, subject or object and subject finite verb. For example: "The man has a motorbike". "You are here". Notional concord is the agreement of the verb with subject according to the idea of number rather than the actual presence of the grammatical marker(s) for the idea. For instance in the sentence: "The committee has agreed". The members of the public have been mobilized". Proximity concord is the agreement of verb with whatever noun or pronoun that closely precedes it, sometimes in reference to the agreement with the headword. For example: If Joseph passes his examination, her teacher, her sister or Sola is to praise for it".

A good number of the syntactic errors committed by students in the regular classroom setting comprising students with and without learning disabilities can be traced to the rules of concord of English. Over the years, concord in English has proved difficult to handle for some users of English, especially, second language users. Akere (2001) identifies some likely errors of concord committed by students with or without learning disabilities in the regular classroom setting. For example, these students encounter challenges on whether to use singular or plural verb for the agreement of the relative pronoun with its antecedent.

These challenges result in errors such as: “This is one of the most remarkable events that has happened in this century”. (Incorrect). “That is one of the most fatal accidents that has occurred this year”. (Incorrect). In each of these two sentences, “has” must be changed to “have” to agree with its subject “that” which is plural because its antecedent (“events” and not “one”) is plural. The correct versions are written below: “This is one of the most remarkable events that have happened in this century”. (Correct). That is one of the most fatal accidents that have occurred this year”. (Correct).

Another difficulty with concord in English among students with or without learning disabilities occurs when students find it difficult to choose appropriate verb when two singular nouns joined by “and” represent the same thing. For instance: “Bread and tea are good for me” (Incorrect). “Beans and rice are my best food”. (Incorrect). The appropriate verbs to be chosen in the sentences above are singular verb(s) not plural verb(s). The correct versions are written below: “Bread and tea is good for me” (Correct). “Beans and rice is my best food”. (Correct).

Precisely, for most students with or without learning disabilities, difficulties experienced in most aspects of English language examination questions on grammar, essay and letter writing emanated from concord. For example, the results of 2011 May/June West African Senior School Certificate Examination were not impressive. The results indicate that a total of 472,906 candidates representing only 30.70 percent of the

1,540,250 candidates who sat for the examination obtained five credits in core subjects including English language and Mathematics. Similarly, for the 2012 May/June West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASCE) only 38.81 percent of 1,995,878 candidates obtained five credits in core subjects including English language and Mathematics (Dike & Oluwaseun, 2012). This appalling performance can be improved upon if the errors of concord committed by all students in the regular classroom setting are addressed. Therefore, more special education researches particularly those that focus on the challenges of mastering the concord of English and the causes of such challenges are needed.

Owoeye (2003) in her own explanation on causes of the challenges of mastering concord of English, reports that teachers, schools, students and parental factors impact strongly on students’ academic achievement across subject areas including mastering of English concord. However, these past efforts have not yielded remarkable improvement in the remediation of the problems encountered by all students in the aspect of English grammar including concord, as shown by the alarming poor academic performance in English Language recorded by Nigerian students as presented above. This is why it has become necessary to focus on the causal factors of challenges in mastering English concord among students with or without learning disabilities and as such, this study provides a background to the extent which teachers, schools, students

and parental factors could impact on students' mastering of English concord.

Owoeye (2003) asserts that most teachers handling the teaching of English concord are not competent. Many of them are poorly equipped in aspects of pronunciation and grammar. Most teachers often avoid the teaching of concord which is the basis for the understanding of the linguistic components of the language. Thus, lack of competence in teaching English grammar affects students with or without learning disabilities in mastering basic rules required for communicative competence. Once the teacher lacks the needed skills, it will cause great challenge for the students to master grammatical rules of English because no one can give what one does not have. Again, no schooling system can prosper beyond the level of expertise and commitment of its teachers (FGN, 2004), and the commitment is anchored on attitudes.

The findings of Norma and Helene (2010) lend credence to the fact that the limited English proficiency of teachers affects students' acquisition of English. Norma and Helene (2010) utilize a total of eight hundred (800) participants in their study to determine the impact of English proficiency on English as a Second Language Learners in South African schools. They further established through their findings that the number of learners per class in the schools is more than the teachers' capacity. From these findings, it can also be inferred that large class size can affect the mastery of students with or without learning disabilities negatively in English grammar (concord).

Furthermore, teaching without instructional materials pose great challenges in mastering English concord. This is because for teaching to achieve its aim of impacting knowledge and for learners to internalize it, it must be embellished with adequate instructional materials such as flash cards, audio and video tapes, language laboratories, programmed texts, magazines and newspapers, pictures representing content learnt, electronic projectors, computers, and computer softwares. However, Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2006) state that some of the aforementioned teaching aids are not readily available in many Nigerian public schools.

In addition, Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2006) examine factors that affect the quality of English Language in senior secondary schools in Nigeria in which three thousand (3000) students were randomly selected in 30 senior secondary schools located across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Their findings reveal that students learn under harsh environment, which is often rowdy, congested and noisy. They report that students agree that their schools are overcrowded, that the furniture is not comfortable for proper sitting, that classrooms do not have proper lighting system and ventilation and that their schools do not have well stocked libraries. These findings do actually buttress that problems faced by students (with or without learning disabilities) in mastering English grammar (especially, concord) to a large extent, emanate from school and teacher related factors.

Besides, a student's self-concept (that is, a collection of beliefs about oneself, Leflot, Onghena, & Colphin, 2010) and self-esteem (a reflection of a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth; a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self, Hewitt, 2009) could influence the mastery of English concord. Smith and Mackie (2007) define self-concept as what we think about the self while self-esteem is the positive and negative evaluation of the self as in how we feel about it. The way a student perceives himself/herself matters most. If a student believes he is a failure, such a student may find it difficult coping with academic work. Such student will definitely find it difficult to generalize new rules of English learnt with what he had already known, and not elaborate in his thinking process. In addition, inability of students with or without learning disabilities to constantly use English language both at home and school can cause the challenges of mastering English concord. Oladele (2000) observes that in some cases, students who communicate often in Yoruba language find it difficult to cope when they get to school. Most of the time such students have an idea of what they want to say or write, but they run into problems because they cannot express themselves in English which is the medium of communication in schools. If these students are given the opportunity to express themselves in their mother language, they perform better.

Moreover, Olatunji (2012) posits that many Nigerian families also contribute to the problem of inadequate

mastery of English grammar (concord) by their children. He explains that English is not a native language in Nigeria yet many Nigerians try to make it their children's first language by adopting it as a medium of communication within their families. In such families, the parents often succeed in transferring Limited English Proficiency Syndrome (LTEPS) to their children. After all, the parents themselves are inhibited by the same circumstances of second language environment. Further, Olatunji (2012) stresses that people of different socio-economic status and age groups commit unpardonable phonological, semantic, syntactic, and lexical blunders in their day-to-day use of the language. Thus, parents who do not provide full-fledge moral and financial support to the academic pursuit of their children; together with those who are not interested in encouraging their children to speak English language outside the classroom constitute challenges to the learning and mastering of English concord.

Smith (2007) observes that students with learning disabilities do not learn in the same way or same pace as their classmates without disabilities. These students often require sustained, intensive and explicit instruction to succeed. They are often characterized as having unexpected underachievement because their academic performance does not match their potential. In fact, students with learning disabilities experience a discrepancy between potential and actual levels of academic performance as predicted by the person's intellectual abilities. Holistically, learning disabilities

can affect one's ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute Mathematics, and reason. Consequently, in general, students with learning disabilities are confronted with greater difficulties than students without learning disabilities in mastering of English concord. Therefore, it has become necessary to focus on the causal factors of challenges of mastering English concord among students with and without learning disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

Persistent poor performance in English Language in Nigeria has been attributed to students' abuse of the basic rules of grammar. Some students with or without learning disabilities encounter problems with grammatical, notional, and proximity concord. Others do not have good grasp of the agreement that exists among various elements of the English sentence. In the field of special education, previous studies have focused mainly on remediation and intervention strategies. As such, there seems to be dearth of information on causal factors responsible for problems encountered by students with learning disabilities as they try to master the concord of English.

Further, many students with learning disabilities are confronted with greater difficulties than students without learning disabilities in concentrating on language development, or visual and auditory information processing, decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and overall academic performance. As a result, it is not surprising to find many secondary school students with learning disabilities whose major area of language-based

difficulty is in the area of English concord. This study, therefore, investigated the potency of teachers, schools, students and parental factors on the challenges facing students with or without learning disabilities in mastering concord of English. Moreover, it also determines the relative contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study.

1. What is the joint contribution of teachers, schools, students and parental factors in the mastering of English concord among students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities?
2. What is the relative contribution of teachers, schools, students and parental factors in the English concord among students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities?

Methodology

The descriptive research design of correlational type is adopted for the study. Random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty (150) senior secondary class one students with and without learning disabilities from four randomly selected senior secondary schools in Ibadan namely, Saint Theresa's College, Oke Ado, Ibadan, 59 (39.3%); Abadina College, Ibadan 35 (23.3%); Lagelu Grammar School, Ibadan, 20 (13.4%); and Cheshire High School, Sango, Ibadan, 36 (24%). The sample consisted of 42 (28%) purposively sampled students with learning disabilities and 108 (72%) students without learning

disabilities. Likewise, there were 58 (38.7%) males and 92 (61.3%) females. Participants' age range was between 11 to 19 years.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in collecting data for the study. These are: Learning Disability Evaluation Scale Renormed Second Edition (LDES-R2) (adapted) and Causal Factors Questionnaire which were designed by the researchers.

LDES-R2 is a screening instrument used to identify students with learning disabilities. It is divided into two sections. The first section consists of the respondents demographic characteristics such as sex, age, class, subject combination while the section B contains sixteen questions that cut across seven different learning disabilities (listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling and mathematical calculation) in students. This scale was developed by McCarney and Arthaud (2007). The researchers subjected this instrument to a pilot test followed by the computation of the reliability co-efficient. The instrument yielded an alpha level of 0.72 using the Cronbach alpha statistics. Then, the researchers adapted this instrument to suit the purpose of the present study.

The researchers scored the sixteen (16) questions adapted from the scale on a four point scale with 4: indicating Strongly Agree, 3: Agree, 2: Disagree and 1: Strongly Disagree. The highest possible score is 64 (4x16). In this study, any score from 45 and above would suggest the presence of learning disabilities in

student. However, scores below 45 would suggest students without learning disabilities. The validity of the items on the questionnaire was ascertained by subjecting the instrument to a pilot test using respondents that were different from the study participants. Data collected from the pilot study was analyzed using Cronbach alpha and a reliability co-efficient of 0.64 was got.

The second instrument tagged Causal Factor Questionnaire is divided into section A and B. Section A sought to obtain demographic data such as name of the school, sex, class and age. Section B was a 20-item 4-point Likert type designed to collect data on teacher, school, student and parental factors. The validity of the items on the questionnaire was ascertained by subjecting the instrument to a pilot test using respondents that were different from the study participants. Data collected from the pilot study was analyzed using Cronbach alpha and a reliability co-efficient of 0.59 was got. This certified that the instrument is reliable.

Procedure for Data Collection

The necessary Letter of introduction from the head of Department, Special Education University of Ibadan was collected and this enabled the researchers to introduce themselves and seek for permission to carry out the research in the school selected for the study. Distribution and retrieval of questionnaires lasted for two weeks. Data were analyzed using t-test statistics and multiple regression analysis.

Result

The results of the study are as stated below:

Research Question 1

What is the joint contribution of teacher, school, student and parental factors on mastering of English concord among students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities?

Table 1: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Combined Prediction to Dependent Variable by the Four Independent Variables

R	=	0.571			
Multiple R	=	0.326			
Multiple R ² adjustment	=	0.308			
Standard Error Estimate	=	9.851			
Analysis of Variance					
Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Regression	6812.848	4	1703.212	17.552	0.000
Residual	14070.245	145	97.036		
Total	20883.093	149			

Table 1 shows the prediction of the four independent variables (teacher factors, student factors, school factors and parental factors) to the dependent variable (mastering of English concord). The result reveals a coefficient of multiple correlations (R) of 0.571, $R^2 = 0.326$ and a multiple adjusted R square of 0.308. The table also shows that the analysis of variance for the regression yielded f-ratio of 17.552 (significant at 0.05 level).

This implies that the joint contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable was significant and that other variables not included in this model may have accounted for the remaining variance.

Research Question 2

What is the relative contribution of teacher, school, student and parental factors on mastering of English concord among students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities?

Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis Showing the Relative Contribution of the Independent Variables to the Dependent Variables

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)		Standardized Coefficients			
Model	(B)	Standard Error	Beta	T	P	Remark
Constant	59.848	3.100	-	19.306	0.000	N
Teacher factors	-0.584	0.303	-0.196	-1.928	0.056	NS
School factors	-0.750	0.274	0.269	-2.738	0.007	S*
Student factors	-0.977	0.331	-0.266	-2.948	0.004	S*
Parental factors	0.590	0.227	0.200	2.600	0.010	S*

Table 2 reveals the relative contribution of the four independent variables to the dependent variable expressed as beta weights. School factors have the greatest contribution of 26.9% ($\beta = 0.269$, $t = 2.738$, $P < 0.05$). This is followed by parental factors with 20.0% ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 2.600$, $P < 0.05$). Then, this is followed by student factor with a contribution of -26.6% ($\beta = -0.266$, $t = -2.948$, $P < 0.05$). Teacher factors have the least contribution of -19.6% ($\beta = -0.196$, $t = -1.928$, $P > 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings of the study have revealed that school, student, parental and teacher factors have significant joint contribution on the mastering of English concord by students with or without learning disabilities. This finding is in

consonance with Owioye's (2003) statement that many causes are associated with the challenges faced by students, in mastering English concord. These causes are teacher, student, parental and school factors. The finding in Table 2 reveals that school factors have the greatest contribution towards the causes of challenges faced by students with or without learning disabilities in mastering of English concord. The finding confirms Owioye's (2003) submission that most schools do not have standard libraries where students can consult explicit books on concord of English. Similarly, the present finding supports Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyawu (2006) findings that students learn under harsh environment, which is often rowdy, congested and noisy. They report that students agreed that their schools are overcrowded; that the furniture is not comfortable for proper sitting, that classrooms are without proper

lighting and ventilation and that their schools do not have well stocked libraries. Thus, school factors are considered as major causal factors that predispose students to encounter problems with mastering of English concord. Moreover, the present finding also agrees with the findings of Norma and Helene (2010) that large class size affects students' acquisition of English.

In agreement with earlier findings of some scholars, table 2 also reveals that parent and student factors make some considerable contributions towards the causes of challenges faced by students with and without learning disabilities in mastering of English concord. Oladele (2000) submitted in her findings that inability of students to constantly use English Language both at home and school will definitely pose a challenge to them in mastering of English concord. Some students lack self-confidence, self-esteem, self-motivation that can aid their mastering of English concord. This actually is a serious personal factor among individual students that should be addressed.

Likewise, parental influence could aggravate the problems of mastering of English concord as confirmed by the present finding. For instance, Olatunji (2012) asserts that although English is not a native language in Nigeria, many Nigerians try to make it their children's first language by adopting it as a medium of communication within their families. In such families, the parents often succeed in transferring Limited English Proficiency Syndrome (LTEPS) to their children. After

all, the parents themselves are inhibited by the same circumstances of second language environments. In other words, parental influence could aggravate the problem of mastering of English concord.

Considering teacher factors which made the least contribution to the problems of mastering of English concord among students with or without learning disabilities according to this present finding, few intriguing arguments are presented. Earlier researchers such as Owoye (2003) disagree with this finding by submitting that most teachers handling the teaching of English concord are not competent. Most teachers often run away from the teaching of concord which is the basis for the understanding of the linguistic components of the language. This affects students with and without learning disabilities in mastering basic rules required for communicative competence. Similarly, Norma and Helene (2010) found that limited English proficiency of teachers has some effects on students' acquisition of English language. Furthermore, Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyawu (2006) had reported that English Language teachers do not frequently use modern instructional technologies and a variety of teaching techniques in their English Language lessons and as such achievement in English language is negatively affected. From the foregoing, the role of teacher factors in the challenges faced by students with or without learning disabilities in mastering of English concord remains inconclusive. Therefore, more studies

should be carried out to verify these claims.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that school, student, parental and teacher factors are the causal factors of challenges in mastering English concord among students with and without learning disabilities. However, teacher factor is the least causal factor of challenges among students with or without learning disabilities in mastering English concord as revealed in this study.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are pertinent to improved proficiency and mastering concord of English.

Schools should endeavour to use suitable and relevant books on English concord for teaching all students particularly students with learning disabilities. Schools should ensure that they equip their libraries with current books on English concord and encourage all students to make use of those books. Learning environment should be conducive and stimulating. Schools should avoid having large number of students in a classroom where English concord is taught. If possible, teachers should consider dividing their students into small groups during English concord lessons to ensure efficiency. Schools should ensure that only qualified teachers of English language should be allowed to teach English language and particularly, English concord.

Concord of English should be taught in an explicit, clear and systematic

manner that provide students with sufficient range of examples to illustrate a concept, opportunity to practice rules of English (concord) that they have learnt in class, motivate the students to learn, evaluate the students' knowledge frequently and provide prompt positive feedback for students' performance so students can persist in activities.

Collaboration between regular teachers of English Language and special educators (specialists in learning disabilities) should be encouraged. The goal is to bridge the gap between students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities in the learning of English concord.

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