RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECT OF AUTONOMOUS LEARNING STRATEGY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SS2 GOVERNMENT STUDENTS IN URUE-OFFONG ORUKU L.G.A-AKWA IBOM STATE-NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Study was set to examine the effect of autonomous learning strategy on academic performance of Government students in secondary schools in Urue-ofong Oruku Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State-Nigeria. Three hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. The study adopted the pre-test-post-test quasi experimental design. The study made use of 80 government students selected from two out of seven schools in Uruefong Oruku Local Government Area. They were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was treated with Government Instructional Package while the control group was taught using thee expository strategy. The two groups were exposed to post-test. Their scripts were collected for marking and scores used for analysis using t-test statistics. The result of the analysis showed a significant effect of use of autonomous learning on academic performance of government students. There was also a significant difference in the mean score of male and female student taught using autonomous learning strategy and there was also a significant difference in academic performance of male and female students taught using expository method. Some recommendations were made to enhance the use of autonomous learning that schools should be equipped with ICT resources and that staff and students should be trained on the use of innovative web-based instructional strategies among other recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Autonomous learning has been emphasized by educators and theorist since the early 1970s. It has played an increasingly important role in the educational reforms currently taking place around the globe. According to Della Fazey and John Fazey (2001), "the capacity to think, learn and behave automatically is often claimed as an outcome for students in secondary schools". Fry (2003), state that the autonomy of student learning commonly refers to "student taking more responsibility for and control of themselves and their learning including being spoon-fed. It may also include elements of students taking more responsibility for determining and directing the content of their learning". According to the author, if the learner is to take increasing responsibility for progress and the teacher aims to facilitate, not control…then autonomous learning becomes crucial. Here, the relationship between the teacher and the student in the learning process is explained. The teachers' role becomes slightly changed; teaching and learning should not always be controlled by the teacher, but should they should guide and help students to learn by themselves. That might lead to a more effective and deeper understanding of learning. Crome (2009), defined autonomous learning as "a habit of mind, expressed through a range of activities and skills, acquired and developed through practice.

From this perspective, autonomous learning becomes the habitual exercise of skills developed and perfected through continuous practice, which comes to be second nature". Once students own this kind of thinking, they will have the ability to learn by themselves. This ability will become second nature, not to mention a good habit. Students will become more motivated to think and work independently. Moreover, they will know what they need and will engender their independent thoughts as well, more focus will be on one's own learning. According to Holec (1981), autonomous learning is described as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". On a general note, the autonomous learning has come to be used at least in five ways according to Benn (1976):

- For situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- For a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- For an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- For the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- For the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

It is noteworthy that autonomous learning strategy can be thought of in terms of a departure from education as a social process, as well as in terms of redistribution of power attending the construction of knowledge and the roles of the participants

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in the learning process. Little (1991), looks at autonomous learning as essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning, a capacity for detachment, critical reflection and decision-making of independent action. It is not something done to learners; therefore, it is far from being another teaching method. In the same vein, Dam (1999) drawing upon Holec (1981), defines autonomous learning in terms of learner's willingness and capacity to control or oversee her own learning. More specifically, the authors hold that someone qualifies as an autonomous learner when he independently choses aims, purposes and set goals; choses materials, methods and tasks; choice and purpose in organizing and carrying out the chosen tasks; and choses criteria for evaluation.

To all intents and purposes, the autonomous learner takes an active role in the learning process, generating ideas and availing himself of learning opportunities, rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher (Little, 1991). For Rathbone (1971), the autonomous learner is self-activated maker of meaning, an active agent in his own learning process. He is not one to whom things merely happen; he is the one who by his own volition causes things to happen. Learning is seen as the result of his own self-initiated interaction with the world. Within such a conception, learning is not simply a matter of rote memorization; 'it is a constructive process that involves actively seeking meaning from (or even imposing meaning on) events' (Candy, 1991). Such "inventories" of characteristics evinced by the putative autonomous learner abound, and some would say that they amount to nothing more than a romantic ideal which does not square with reality.

For instance, Candy (1976) equates the autonomous learner to one whose life has a consistency that derives from a coherent set of beliefs, values and principles and who engages in a still continuing process of criticism and re-evaluation, while Rousseau (1962) regards the autonomous learner as someone who is 'obedient to a law that he prescribes to himself'. Within the context of education, though there seem to be seven main attributes characterizing autonomous learners (Omaggio, 1978). Autonomous learners have insights into their learning styles and strategies; they take an active approach to the learning task at hand; they are willing to take risks i.e. to communicate in the target language at all costs; they are good guessers; attend to form as well as to content, that is, place importance on accuracy as well as appropriateness; develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to revise and reject hypotheses and rules that do not apply; and have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language. More often, the pedagogical strategy adopted by most teachers of government seems to emphasize lecture methods where the learners remain passive and the teacher becomes the chief orator during teaching and learning. This situation may be responsible for the poor performance of government students in internal and external examinations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts the pre-test-post-test quasi experimental design to establish cause and effect of a phenomenon. The purpose was to examine the effect of autonomous learning on academic performance of government students. Three research hypotheses were postulated to guide the study.

The study made use of 80 students studying government in two secondary schools out of seven secondary schools in the local government area. Each school had 20 experimental students in the experimental group and another 20 students in the control group. Their subject teachers were trained as research assistants for three days on how to treat the experimental groups and teach the control group by expository method. The study was developed following Fritcher theory of (1929), that human behavior follows a process to logical end of gaining new experiences.

A package called Autonomous Learning Strategy Package (ALSP) was systematically developed using the ASSURE model as postulated by Heinnich, Molenda and Russel (1982), where every instructional system components was identified, analyzed and matched with the content, method of instruction and level of learners. The package was used in the treatment of the experimental groups and the exercise lasted for two weeks. After the treatment, all the groups were post-tested and their scripts were retrieved for marking. The scores were used for analysis and comparison.

Data Analysis and Findings

Research Question 1: What is the academic performance of SS2 students in government using autonomous learning strategy and those taught with expository method?

Table 1. Mean Score Difference between Students using autonomous learning strategy and those taught with expository method

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Autonomous learning strategy	40	9.8	3.2
expository method	40	68	7.0

Data obtained in Table 1 shows that those that used autonomous learning strategy had their mean score (9.8) and those taught with lecture method had their mean score (68). This means that those taught with lecture method performed better than those that used autonomous learning strategy.

Research Question 2: What is the academic performance of SS2 male and female students in government using autonomous learning strategy?

Table 2. Mean Score Difference between male and female Students using autonomous learning strategy

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Male	40	6.2	3.6
Female	40	3.6	3.2

Data obtained in Table 2 indicates that male students that used autonomous learning strategy had their mean score (6.2) and female had their mean score (3.6). This means that male students performed better than female students using autonomous learning strategy.

Research Question 3: What is the academic performance of SS2 male and female students taught using expository method?

Table 3. Mean Score Difference between male and female Students in government taught using expository method

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Male	40	13.0	4.2
Female	40	15.2	5.6

Data obtained in Table 3 indicates that male students that were taught with lecture method had their mean score (13.0) and female had their mean score (15.2). This means that female students performed better than male students in lecture method.

Table 4. t-test analysis of mean score difference between students using autonomous learning strategy academic and those taught using expository method in government

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	t-crit	df	Decision
Autonomous Learning strategy	40	9.8	3.2				
				8.06	4.0	88	Significant
Expository Method	40	68.0	7.0				

@ P=< 0.05 level of significance

Table 5. t-test analysis of mean score difference between male and female SS2 students using autonomous learning strategy

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	t-crit	df	Decision
Male	40	6.2	3.6	3.72	4.00	88	Not Sig.
Female	40	3.6	3.2				

@ P=< 0.05 level of significance

Table 6. t-test analysis of mean score difference between male and female SS2 students in government taught using expository method

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	t-crit	df	Decision
Male	40	13.0	4.2	8.38	4.0	88	Significant
Female	40	15.2	5.6				

@ P=< 0.05 level of significance

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis I: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of SS2 students in government using autonomous learning strategy and those taught with expository method. Table 4 presents the computed t-value (8.06). This value was compared with the critical value (4.0) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88. The computed t-value is greater than the t-critical. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is statistically significant difference in the academic performance of students in government using autonomous learning strategy and those taught using expository method.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of SS2male and female students in government using autonomous learning strategy.

In table 5, the calculated t-value (3.72) was less than the critical value (4.0) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88. The t-critical is greater than the computed t-value. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted, meaning that there is no statistically significant difference in the academic performance of male and female SS2 students in government using autonomous learning strategy.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of male and female SS2 students in government taught with expository method.

In table 6, the calculated t-value (8.38) was greater than the critical value (4.0) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is statistically significant difference in the academic performance of male and female SS2 students in government taught withexpository method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the analysis on table 4 presents the computed t-value (8.06). This value was compared with the critical value (4.00) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88. The computed t-value was greater than the critical value. Thus the hypothesis was rejected, meaning that there is statistically significant difference in the academic performance of students in government using autonomous learning strategy and lecture strategy. This findings is in agreement with Akinlaye, et al (1996) who found that the method of teaching has significant relationship in students' performance in government. The Result of the analysis in table 5 presents the computed t-value (3.72). This was less than the critical value (4.0) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted, meaning that there is no statistically significant difference in the academic performance of male and female SS2 students in government using autonomous learning strategy. This therefore indicates that autonomous learning strategy has no effect on the student based on gender. The result of the analysis on table 6 presents the t-value (8.38). This was greater than the critical value (4.0) at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom 88.

This means that there is statistically significant difference in the academic performance of male and female SS2 students in government taught with lecture method. This therefore indicates that lecture method has a relationship with the academic performance of SS2 students based on gender. This result is in agreement with Adewoyin (2001), who found that lecture method is significantly related to student's performance because it allows the teacher to cover large number of topics of the syllabus.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that autonomous learning strategy is not effective among secondary school students in government. This is due to the student not having enough materials to obtain information from, and their inability to use computer, assess the internet and also use the cyber –café. These have limited their level of gaining information and also thwart their academic performance in government. It was observed that pupils depend on their teacher breaking down the concepts to them through lecture method rather than they themselves carrying out research to discover for themselves certain concepts in government and other subjects.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Schools should equip their libraries with current and valid information resources, example books, journals, newspaper, etc.
- Teachers should adopt the teaching and learning strategies suitable for teaching students government. They should also give room for students to study and do research by themselves for effective learning.
- Students should be encouraged by teachers to study independently and develop themselves through the use of autonomous learning strategy.
- Government should provide technological devices to secondary schools that will enable pupils gain access to modern methods of learning for independently study.
- Government should also provide adequate training for teachers and students on the use of information devices that are provided for their usage.

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