English Language Proficiency as a Predictor of Academic Achievement among EFL Students in Nigeria

Fakeye, David 0.

Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan. Ibadan, Nigeria
E-mail: fako4best@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examined the extent to which Nigerian secondary school students' proficiency in English predicted their overall academic achievement in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. From the population of students in the two states, 400 students were proportionately sampled from eight randomly sampled secondary schools. Two Research questions guided the study in which two Research instruments namely, English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) was used. The performance of the respondents in the ELPT was correlated with the students' annual scores in cores school subjects — Mathematics, Biology and English using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis at .05 level. The results showed that English language proficiency of the students has a significant positive relationship with their overall academic achievement and that there is a significant impact of English language proficiency on students overall academic achievement. Based on these findings, it is recommended that efforts should be geared towards making the Nigerian students proficient in English as a way of improving their academic performance.

Keywords: English language, Proficiency, Predictor, Academic achievement, Students, Senior Secondary Schools

Introduction

The multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of Nigerian polity on the one hand and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language on the other have led to the adoption of English language as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication (Fakeye 2006) . More importantly English language has become the pivot on which the educational wheel of Nigeria rotates. The language is the medium of instruction for all school subjects from the primary school level to the university, in addition to being a compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria (Ajufo,2007;Ayede,2012).

The poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria. As Maleki and Zangani (2007) observe, having difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum taught in the target language (English language) seems to be one of the most serious problems that EFL students face in their particular course of study. This is the same problem with Nigerian ESL students whose performance in the various schools subjects at public examinations is nothing to write home about.

This might be due to their weaknesses in English language, the medium of instruction, which may have negative consequences on their overall academic achievement. In the argument of Feast (2002), when students are deficient in the language of instruction, it follows that they would not perform well in the various school subjects taught in the target language. Therefore, the overall performance of Nigerian ESL students depends, to a very large extent, on their English language proficiency. Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the language ability or ability in language use Oller (1983) avers that language proficiency is not a single unitary ability but that it consists of several distinct but related constructs in addition to a general construct of language proficiency.

The relationship between students overall academic achievement in the content areas and their language proficiency has been examined by scholars. Butler and Castellon — Wellington (2000) compared students' performance in content areas to concurrent performance on a language proficiency test and found a correlation between the two. Ulibarri, Maria, Spencer and Rivas (1981) examined the relationship between Hispanic students' performance in English language tests and their achievement in Mathematics and discovered that the language test data were not very useful in predicting achievement in Mathematics. Bayliss and Raymond (2004) examined the link between academic success and second language proficiency and concluded that the relationship between academic achievement and language proficiency disappears as students approach native-like proficiency levels. Idialu (2013) examined the correlation between students English Language Proficiency and their achievement in Literature –in –English in Southwestern Nigeria and found a high correlation between English Language proficiency and achievement in Literature-in English.

As a result of the conflicting findings, it is pertinent to further examine the extent to which senior secondary school students' proficiency in English language will predict their overall academic achievement in Nigeria.

The Problem

The poor performance of Nigerian senior, secondary school students in various school subjects at public examinations has often been blamed on their weakness in English language which is the medium through which knowledge in school subjects is transferred to learners. The intent of this study was to examine the extent to whish English language proficiency of Nigerian senior secondary school students would predict their overall academic achievement.

Research Questions

In this connection, the following research questions were proposed to give direction to the study.

I   Is there any significant relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Nigerian Senior secondary school students?

2   Does English language proficiency have a significant impact on achievement in English-Medium core subjects of Nigerian senior secondary school students?

Scope of the Study

The study examined the extent to which 400 senior secondary school students proficiency in English correlates with, and ultimately predicts their overall academic achievement in Oyo and Osun State of Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The study provides an insight into the root cause of falling standard of secondary education in Nigeria. Findings from this study will also help to raise the proficiency level of Nigerian secondary school students in English language as a way of addressing their poor academic achievement. The curriculum planners and all stakeholders in Education would also be sensitized about the indispensable position of English language in the overall knowledge acquisition process in formal education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A combined ex-post facto and Correlational design were adopted in this study in view of the fact that the researcher had no direct control of the independent variable as its manifestation has already existed. It is only its relationship with the dependent variable that was retrospectively studied.The population of the study consisted of senior secondary school two students from Oyo and Osun states of Nigeria. Specifically, a total of 400 SS 11 students were proportionately sampled from eight randomly sampled secondary schools from Oyo and Osun states of Nigeria (four schools from each state).The major research instruments used in this study was English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT), a standardized TOEFL paper test and Interview designed to test the participants speaking skills.

The ELPT tested students listening, reading comprehension, grammar and written expressions as well as vocabulary. The grading criteria for assessing the interview were pronunciation, style, vocabulary, grammar, suitability, fluency and accuracy, to all of which equal points were assigned.The ELPT is a standardized TOEFL paper test. A test-retest method was used to determine its reliability and a value of 0.92 was obtained.

The study lasted for six weeks. The ELPT was first administered to participating students and this was followed by the interview. The scores of students in the ELPT was used to decide their English language proficiency scores. Then, the academic achievement scores of the participants in three core subjects viz: English, Mathematics and Biology were collected. The English language proficiency scores were run against the students' scores in the core subjects to determine the relationship between them. Data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlational Analysis to examine the degree of relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Linear Regression Analysis was also done to determine the impact of English language proficiency on students overall academic achievement at 0.05 level.

RESULTS

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	F	%
Male	109	54.5
Female	91	45.5
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 1 reveals that 200 students participated in the study, out of which 54.5% were male ad 45.5% were female. This implies that both sexes were represented in the study.

Table 2: Level of Students' Proficiency in English

Level of performance	f	%	Mean perform	Std.
0-39	8	4.0		
40-49	43	21.5		
50-59	86	43.0	58.17	43.8
60-69	52	26.0		
70 and above	11	6.5		
Total	**200**	**100**		

Table 2 reveals that only 4% of the sampled students failed the proficiency in English test; 2 1.5% had ordinary pass; 43% had lower credit, 26% had upper credit while 6.5% had distinction.

The mean performance is 58.2% which is above average. This shows that the students English language proficiency is above average.

Research Question I

Is there a significant relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement of Nigerian senior secondary school students?

Table 3: Summary of Pearson-Product Movement Correlation

Variable	N	Mean	Std.D	R	P	Remark
Proficiency score	200	58.17	47.38			
Average academic performance	200	218.61	43.81	.499	.000	Sig.

P<0.05

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between proficiency in English language and the students' academic performance (r 0.499; P < .05). The positive relationship implies that the more proficient students are in English language, the better the academic performance of such students.

Research Question 2

To what extent would students' proficiency in English determine their academic performance?

Table 4: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis Proficiency

Independent variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R square	model	Sum of squares	df	Mean	F	Sig. (P)
English language	.499	..421	408	Regression	4013.622	1	4013.622		
Proficiency				Residual	44149.833	198	222.979		
				Total	48163.455	199		18.0	.000

P<0.05

Dependent variable: Academic Performance

Table 4 reveals that the coefficient of determination (Adjusted R^2) = 0.408, which gives the proportion of variance to be 40.8%. This implies that about 40.8% of the total changes in this student's academic performance is determined by the level of the students proficiency in English language.

The effect is also shown to be significant (F(l,198) = 18.0; P < .05). Therefore, it could be concluded that about 41% of changes in students' performance is accounted for by proficiency in English Language and this effect is significant.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between English language Proficiency and academic achievements of the subjects studied (r 0.499). This suggests that as English proficiency increases, so does academic success. This finding supports the views of researchers that there is a correlation between proficiency in the language of instruction and overall academic achievement of learners (Ajibade 1993; Feast 2002; Graves 2001;Olamide, 2008).

In separate studies, Feast (2002) and Graves (2001) found a significant and positive relationship between English language proficiency and performance at University as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA). Ajibade (1993) found a significant positive relationship between Proficiency in English and achievement in French among Nigeria Secondary School students. This study further showed that proficiency in English does have a significant impact on senior secondary school students academic achievement FC(1198) 18.0; P < .05). This means that the subjects with higher language proficiency had higher academic achievement scores in the core school subjects and vice-versa. This finding accords perfectly with that of Stern (1992)'s discovery that the weak overall language ability of Iranian undergraduate students affects drastically their academic success in the university semester examinations.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, it is found from this study' that English language proficiency is a good indicator and

predictor of academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that the goals of educating Nigerian ESL learners to be proficient in English should be rigorously pursued since English language proficiency ultimately determines their overall academic success. This requires a concerted effort of all stakeholders in the education sector in Nigeria such as Curriculum planners, text book writers and English language teachers. Also, English language, in spoken and written form, should be given special attention at all levels of Nigerian educational system in view of the potential implications of such measure in all areas of academic development. Finally, the English language teachers in Nigeria should be specially equipped through refresher courses, workshops, seminars and symposia to enable them teach the four language skills of Listen big. Speaking, Reading and Writing effectively at secondary school levels.

REFERENCES

Ajibade, A. V. (1993). Proficiency in English and Affective factors as predictors of senior secondary School students' Achievement in French. *Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Ajufo,V.I (2007) Effects of Peer-Tutoring Instructional Strategy on Senior Secondary School Students' Achievement in English Grammar in Ibadan. *Unpublished MEd Project, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental consideration in language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

Bayliss, D., & Raymond, P.M. (2004). The link between academic success and L2 proficiency in the context of two professional programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 61 (i), 29-51.*

Butler, F. A., & Castelion-Weilington, M. (2000). Students' Concurrent performance on tests of English language proficiency and academic achievement. In, the validity of administrating large-scale content assessments to' English language learners: An investigation from three perspectives. *National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and student testing. University of California, Los Angeles.*

Fakeye, D. 0. (2006). ICT- Assisted instruction and students vocabulary Achievement in selected senior secondary schools in Ibadan. In *Journal of Humanities in education Vol. 1(1) pp. 14-21.*

Feast, V. (2002). The impact of JELTS scores on performance at University. *International Education Journa4 3(4), 70- 85. GarCia-Vazquez, E., Vazquez, L. A., Lopez, I. c., & Ward, W. (1997).*

Idialu, P. O. (2013). English Language Proficiency and Study Habit as Correlates of Learning Outcomes in Literature in English in South Western Nigeria. *A Post-Field Doctoral Seminar Paper.Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Olamide, M. Z. (2008). Influence of Oral English Proficiency on Verbal Communication of Senior Secondary Students in Ondo State. *Unpublished M.Ed Project University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*

OIler, J. W. (Ed.) (1983). Issues in language testing research. Rowley, Mass: Newbury house. [91 Stern, H. H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*

Ulibarri, D., Maria, M., Spencer, L., & Rivas, G. A. (1981). Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement: A study of Language Proficiency Tests and their relationships to School Rating as Predictors of Academic Achievement. *NABE Journal, 5, 47-80.*