



doi:10.5281/zenodo.14757616

Language Skills As Predictors Of Academic Performance In English Language Among The Students Of The Department English, Isa Kaita College Of Education Dutsinma Katsina State

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the extent to which language skills predicted the academic performance of the students of the Department of English, Isa Kaita College of Education Dutsinma, Katsina State. The predictive correlational research design were used for the study with a sample of 230 secondary school students drawn using stratified random sampling Techniques. An instrument titled English Language Skills Scales can also be used for data collection, while students' school-based performance in English Language and Mathematics were used for assessing their academic Performance. The ELSS has an alpha coefficient of 0.82. For answering the research questions, simple linear regression was used, while the hypotheses were tested using ANOVA associated with linear regression. The result from the study shows that while written language and reading comprehension skills had significant predictions on the academic performance of both female and male students, spoken language skills only had significant prediction for female, but not for male students. Based on the results, appropriate recommendations were made.

Keywords: academic performance, language skills, students

INTRODUCTION

Several factors have contributed in shaping the current Nigerian environment. However, one which has remained a reoccurring decimal is the standard of education in the country. Education is one of the propelling forces which the government embraces for driving national development relevant to the aspirations of the individual and those of the society, which is also in line with the realities of our environment and the modern world (Onifade, 2006). In this direction, Abid (2006) averred that the quality of a nation is judged by the quality of its citizens and the quality of the citizens largely relies on the quality of their education. While education has been shown to be vital to the level of a country's progress, one factor that has remained vital for students and teachers to communicate effectively is language skills. Language skills are considered as a factor that shares a relationship with academic performance, which is the yardstick for measuring quality of education. Language skills are defined as cognitive skills combining knowledge and understanding with practice in language use, generally consisting of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This implies that for any student to perform well in academics, such a student should have good combination of the knowledge and understanding of the instructional and learning language of the school in the areas of speaking, reading, listening and writing.

The above point seems like a disadvantage for countries without a common unifying language. According to Fakaye(2006), the lack of a common language in Nigeria has not only raised the fear of mutual suspicion, it has also limited students' ability in understanding educational concepts. Thus, the multi-

lingual and heterogeneous nature of Nigeria and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language gave room for the adoption of the English Language as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication and more so as the language of instruction from the primary level to tertiary level. It therefore follows that the mastery of English Language skills is a requisite for sound academic Performance in Nigerian schools. Conversely, poor language skills among students have made many deficient in understanding classroom instruction and examination preparation.

Nowhere has this become more apparent than in students' performance in the English Language with the attendant consequences. Fakeye and Yemi (2009) argue strongly that poor performance of students in English language at Public examinations in recent times is a contributing factor in the fall of academic achievement and standard of education in Nigeria. In the same vein, Maleki and Zangani (2007) observe that having difficulties in the full understanding of the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum taught in the target language (the English Language) appears to be one of the most serious problems that English as Second Language (ESL) students contend with in their particular course of study. Corroborating the above argument, Feast (2002) posits that when students are not well grounded in the language of instruction, they would hardly perform well in the various school subjects taught in the target language. Hence, it is believed that the overall performance of Nigerians in English as Second Language (ESL) depends, to a considerable extent, on their mastery of English language skills (Fakeye & Yemi, 2009).

Therefore, taking into consideration the importance of academic performance to education and to the development of the nation at large, it becomes necessary to investigate how English language skills plays a vital roll with academic performance of secondary school students to determine their independent and joint prediction of academic performance of students.

Observation by these researchers and empirical evidence from examination bodies have shown that academic performance, especially among secondary school students in Nigeria, has been at a very low ebb, and this has been generating serious concerns among various stakeholders including parents, educational administration, students themselves and the government. These findings are corroborated by the high level of school dropout in Katsina State.

Specifically, for instance, every year, the West African Examination Council laments over massive failure of candidates that sit the final examination. A recent finding revealed that only 32.32% of Nigerian WAEC candidates made 5 credits including English and Mathematics from 2010 to 2014 while 67.7% were not able to make it; thus, only 32.32% met the minimum 5 credits requirement for admission into any Nigerian University within these years. It follows therefore that 67.7% of Nigerian candidates who sat for only WASSCE during these years would be at home for at least another one year, struggling to make up their required subjects that would qualify them for admission into the higher educational institutions. It is usually at this time that discouragement, frustration and loss of interest in education set in. More worrisome is the fact that the English language, which is the language of teaching and communication in schools, churches, textbooks, public offices, etc. and which has almost completely replaced most of our native languages in our homes, is the subject that records the worst performance in external examinations like WASSCE, SSCE, UTME, etc. To stem this worrisome trend, it is pertinent that effective interventions are made. However, such interventions are only possible with an empirical understanding of English Language Skills among secondary school students. It was therefore on this basis that the current study is being undertaken.

Statement Of The Problem

The level of students in the elementary stage in the English does not meet the expected learning outcomes in various language skills (Al-Zoubi, 2013). Therefore, it has become necessary to identify the causes of students' learning disabilities in the English language from its various aspects. The rationale behind this reasoning is that the English language is very important in achieving the objectives of the educational system and the progress of individuals scientifically and practically. The idea of this study is to identify the relationship between learning language skills to the learning disabilities of students in the English language and methods of treating them. Therefore, it is necessary to take the opinions of students to face these difficulties, as taking their opinions will lead to a deeper understanding of the language, in addition

to achieving better performance on the part of both the teacher and the learner alike.

Objective Of The Study

The main objective of this research work is to determine the problems facing the teaching and learning of the communication skills and provide possible prospects to that specifically.

This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- To identify the causes of learning disabilities among students in the English language at the elementary stage in Irbid Governorate from the students' point of view.
- To investigate the relationship between learning language skills and learning difficulties in the English language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of psychomotor skills of the curriculum in educational psychology is achieved through constant active participation of the students in practical activities. This is observed by the researcher during teaching practice supervision. According to scholars like Okoro (1999) and Okwori (2012) the psychomotor domain was first developed by Bloom in 1938 which has five stages. According to Chapman (2006) they are: imitation (copying), manipulation (following instruction), develop precision, articulation (integrate related skills) and naturalization (becoming expert). The main focus of the psychomotor domain of learning is for high productivity at all levels of life. As knowledge continued to increase, other models were developed and published. Yalams (2001) noted that the choice of the model for use depends on the need at hand. Thus, the psychomotor aspect of building trade is to equip the learner with skills such as design, selection of appropriate building tools, setting out a task from the design and implementing the whole design based on the specifications which at present is not obtainable within the study area. Others are observation of safety rules, finishing the task to standard and the care of the tools and equipment. In order to achieve the desired skills the curriculum of building trade is designed in modular form (FRN, 2013). However, it is observed that the implementation of this curriculum has not been effectively achieved. According to Bulama (2008), the achievement of psychomotor skills aspect of technical education is faced with challenges. Teachers are the major stakeholders in the implementation of this curriculum, since they are knowledgeable enough to respond to the challenges faced in the implementation. Administrators, on the other hand, facilitate the implementation process at the school managerial level. It is based on these premises that the study compared mean opinions of building trades teachers and administrators on the challenges affecting the effective implementation and the strategies for overcoming the challenges. This study is specifically concerned with assessment of the challenges that affect the implementation of the desired psychomotor skills in tertiary institutions.

Similarly, Flege (1988) understands language as being more than sounds produced and heard. According to him, language is a means of arousing and creating an association which deepens personal thinking so that one's individual mental life becomes a part of the mental life of a group. All human experience has achieved in terms of classification of ideas and ways of dealing with situations can be communicated through language. Language is not mere sounds produced and heard; it is a means of influencing personality. Hence, the value of adequate language skills development to education in general and academic performance specifically cannot be over-emphasized. Hughes (2007) states that language is organized using four cueing systems; which together make oral and written communication possible. According to her, these four language systems are: the phonological or sound system of language, the syntactical or structural system of language, the semantic or meaning system of language, and the pragmatic or special and cultural use system of language. However, Crow and Crow (1996) prefer to organize language in terms of speaking, reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and listening. The latter is more suitable for the purpose of this study and therefore is adopted for this investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The correlational research design was adopted for the study because the study sought to ascertain the extent to which students' English Language Skills can be used to predict their academic performance in the Department of English, Isa Kaita College of Education Dutsin-Ma Katsina State. A sample of 230

Senior Secondary School Students were drawn through stratified random sampling techniques will be used for the study. The instrument used for the study, was the English Language Skills Scale adapted from the Language Proficiency Descriptor Scale by Brian North (1997). The English Language Skills Scale (ELSS) is made up of part A which contains an item designed to elicit information on the student’s sex and part B which contains 15 questions on Spoken English Language Ability, each with 5 possible responses designed to assess spoken English skills, 10 questions for Written English Language Ability to assess written English skills and 5 questions for Reading Comprehension Ability to assess reading skills. In all, the questionnaire contains 30 items designed to assess English language skills which is one of the variables of this research. The schools’ academic records of the participants’ performance in Mathematics and English will be used by the researchers to determine their achievements. Their achievements in Mathematics and English would be correlated with the result of the English.

Language Skills Scale. Cronbach alpha reliability shows that the ELSS had a coefficient OF 0.82, thus affirming that the instrument would be reliable for the study. For answering the research questions guiding the study, simple linear regression will be used, while the corresponding null hypotheses were tested using analysis of variance associated with simple linear regression. The obtained results were presented below:

RESULTS

Research Question One: *To what extent do English Language skills of the female students predict their academic performance?*

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. To what extent do English Language skills of the female students predict their academic performance in Katsina State?

The Department English, Isah Kaita College Education Dutsi-Ma.

2. To what extent do English Language skills of the male students predict their academic performance in the department of English?

This research question will be answered using simple linear regression where the female students’ scores in ELSS and academic achievement will be as the independent and dependent variables respectively. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Simple linear regression on the prediction of female students’ academic achievement on their English language skills.

Model	Variable	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Std Error of the estimate	Unstandardized coefficient
1	Constant female ELSS	0.234	0.055	0.051	10.792	28.45 0.895

Model 1 of Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient (R) obtained from the prediction of female academic achievement from their spoken language skills is 0.734. Then the coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.055 while the adjusted coefficient of determination is 0.051. This is clear that the female students ELSS can only explain 5.10% of the differences in the academic achievement levels, while the remaining 94.9% are unexplained by their English language skills. Furthermore, it is also shown in Table 1 that the unstandardized coefficient (B) obtained are 28.446 and 0.895 respectively for constant and female ELSS. This in predicting female academic achievement the model or the equation to be used is: $Y_1 = 28.446 + 0.895x$ where y_1 is the predicted score in academic achievement of the female while x is any score of the female in ELSS. Hypothesis One: English language skills of the female students do not significantly predict their academic achievement. This null hypothesis was tested using analysis of variance related with simple linear regression. This was done in three separate dimensions considering the three English language skills via spoken English language ability considered in this study. These three English language skills abilities served separately as the independent variable in each dimension while the

female students' academic achievement score was the dependent variable. The results from the analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of variance related with simple linear regression analysis on the prediction of the female academic achievement on their English language skills.

Model	Skills	Source of variance	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	SELA	Regression	1536.63	1	1536.63	13.20	0.000
		Residual	26552.34	228	116.46		
		Total	28088.97	229			
2	WELA	Regression	2479.75	1	2479.75	22.08	0.000
		Residual	25609.22	228	112.32		
		Total	28088.97	229			
3	RCA	Regression	449.586	1	449.596	3.709	0.055
		Residual	27639.38	228	121.23		
		Total	28088.97	229			

DISCUSSION

From the result presented in this study, it can be seen that for female students' English Language Skills had a significant independent prediction on their academic achievement. Furthermore, the same result was obtained for male students. However, while spoken language skills did not have any significant influence on the academic achievement of male students, written and reading comprehension had significant prediction on the academic achievement of both male and female students respectively. This result is expected because the researchers of the view that an individual who is high in spoken English language ability written English language ability, reading comprehension ability in combination with good study habit will achieve higher and vice versa. This result of the study may be attributed to the fact that English language is the official language and it is the major language of instruction in Rivers State. Hence, it is the second language for almost all the individuals in the state. That is, if an individual cannot read, understand and write well in English language, it will be difficult for such a person to achieve higher in other subjects. Again, if an individual can read, understand and write well in English language but does not study well, achieving higher scores may not be difficult. This finding is in line with that of Feast (2002), who found that English language proficiency positively relate significantly with students' academic achievement.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the result obtained, the following recommendations were made. 1. The English teachers should endeavour to map out modalities to enhance acquisition of English language skills as this will not only promote achievement in English language but will also extend to other subjects. 2. Students with poor study habits should be encourage to visit counselors who will assist them to have good study habit. 3. The emphasis on making English language a compulsory subject to pass before one gets promote should be on the overall performance in the subject but on the specific areas such writing skills, speaking skills, and reading

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was conducted under the sponsorship of TETfund Institution Based Research (IBR) given to Isa Kaita College of Education Dutsinma Katsina State.

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