

Students' English language proficiency and academic performance in vocational education in College of Education (Tech.), Lafiagi, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper investigated the influence of English language on students' performance in vocational education, majorly on Agricultural science and Economics education courses, respectively. 120 graduating students of 2012/2013 academic session were sampled for the study. Four research hypotheses were tested and formulated upon this study. T-test was a statistical tool found suitable for this study. Results indicated that English language influenced students' academic performance in vocational education. Students' academic performance based on gender in English and in the English of Agricultural science and Economics education students has shown that there was no significant difference. Recommendations were put to the fore based on the findings of this study.*

Keywords: *Academic performance; Vocational education and Language proficiency.*

I. Introduction

Vocational education in a comprehensive term which referred to the educational process that involves the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of the economics and social life. This form of education covered the process of training skilled man-power to be self-reliant for national development [13]. It is therefore expedient to say that this form of education can help this country from her current problem of unemployment and this can make it necessary for Nigeria to put emphasis on vocational education as an indispensable element in capacity and competent building for social growth and development, but it is sadden to know that the major language (English Language) with which this vocational education will be made impacted into the students is in crisis.

Nevertheless, where the proficiency in English is lacking in any academic setting, it could lower the academic performance of such students. Yet, students' academic performance in English language or General English as the case may be is worrisome and awfully poor [11]. [2] further revealed that lack of proficiency in English language is one of the factors contributing to poor performance in Mathematics. In his research, he observed that the performance of students in Mathematics' examination at Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is poor and this he linked to poor reading ability.

[9]In his work concluded that competency in English significantly determines performances in intelligence or academic tests. The revelation above seems to suggest that mastery of English language is very importance in students' academic performance in intelligence tests. The bond of contention now is can English language be a virile tool in measuring students' academic performance in vocational education that involves a lot of practical in the acquisition of skills. Vocational education is an aspect of education, which leads to the acquisition of skills. The mindset is that the individual is trained to be self-reliant, and well productive.

More importantly, vocational education is part of total education given to an individual in order to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge require for employment in specific occupation. Thus, vocational education prepared the people for the world of work [7]. However; this cannot be achieved without proper understanding of the language of communication and instruction in school. Students trained in vocational education programs require English language to properly understand the contents of the programs, which in turn will improve the academic understanding of the student.

To this effect, good language proficiency in English language may be a positive predictive validity variable on the performance of students on intelligence test. This [6] and [15] asserted when it was discovered that the measurements of intelligence tend to reflect the learner's mastery of language and in this sense English language. It was on this note that [1] while lamenting on the poor performance of students in West African Examination Council (WAEC) said that the matter is serious because of the influence English has on all the

other subjects of the curriculum which invariably pointed at the notion that students' success in English language could influence the overall performance of students in other disciplines.

On the rostrum of gender, Gender has been found to play an importance role in influencing students' academic performance and activities along with different factors such as intelligence, study habit, self-concept, creativity, aptitude, interests, reading culture and socio-economic status of the parents. Gender issues have become the talk of today's educational forum[12]. Although, the literacy rate is more among boys than girls in some parts of the world. It is quite interesting to observe that girls are securing better rank than boys in almost all academic circles and other competitive examinations [14]. To this effect, studies have shown that there exists distinction between boys and girls in their academic performance based on gender.

II. Research methodology

This research work employed descriptive survey method where students' scores in General English along with their scores in Agricultural science and Economics education were collected and analyzed for the purpose of this study. The sampled population comprises of students from Kwara State College of Education (T.), Lafiagi.

Research instrument

Pro-forma was used to collect students' scores from year 1 to 3. The instrument needs no validation since the result has gone for moderation under various distinctive higher institutions with the country before being released.

Sampling and sampling techniques

A total number of one hundred and twenty students were randomly sampled from the graduating students of 2012/2013 academic session. Out of those sampled in Agricultural science education, thirty six were males while twenty four were females. In Economics education, thirty two were males and twenty-eight were females

Scope and limitation of the study

The study will only investigate the influence of General English proficiency on student' academic performance in vocational education courses in Kwara State College of Education (Tech.), Lafiagi, Nigeria. The study focused on General English and vocational education courses as explained in the curriculum by the National Commission for Colleges of Education.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this research is to find out the influence of General English proficiency on students' academic performance in vocational education courses. The study will specifically find out;

1. The difference in the English of students' academic performance of Agricultural science and Economics education courses.
2. Students' academic performance based on gender in General English.

Research hypotheses

Specifically, the following research hypotheses will guide the study:

1. There is no significant influence of General English proficiency on students' academic performance in Agricultural science education
2. There is no significant influence of General English proficiency on students' academic performance in Economics science education
3. There is no significant difference in the English of students' academic performance in Agricultural science and Economics education courses.
4. There is no significant difference in the male and female academic performance of students in General English.

III. Findings

Table 1

T-test performance of English and Agricultural science education

	Mean	Std.	t-cal	t-tab	Df
English Agriculture	6.2203	16.1630	2.956	1.665	58

Table 2
T-test performance of English and Economics education

	Mean	Std.	t _{cal}	t _{tab}	Df
English	5.4666	10.5532	4.012	1.665	59
Economics					

Table 3
T-test performance of Agricultural science and Economics education students in English

	Mean	Std.	t _{cal}	t _{tab}	Df
Agric. Edu.	.98333	13.8006	.552	1.665	59
Eco. Edu.					

Table 4
T-test performance in English based on gender

	Mean	Std.	t _{cal}	t _{tab}	Df
Male Eng.	2.5714	11.8304	1.627	1.665	55
Female Eng.					

Significant at 00.5

It is plausible to infer that, English language's proficiency influences students' academic performance in vocational education. This is as a result of the notion that the t_{cal} in table 1 and 2 is greater than the t_{tab}. The first two research hypothesis was thereby rejected. To this end, the implication is that English language could be a factor to students' academic performance in other fields.

Students' academic performance based on gender in English and in the English of Agricultural science and Economics education students has shown that there was no significant difference.. Hence, research hypothesis 3 and 4 are thereby accepted since the t_{tab} is greater than the t_{cal}.

IV. Discussion of findings

The importance of English language for enhancing educational attainment through improved communication ability can never be over emphasized. Students who have so many difficulties with their communication skill in English language may not function effectively, not only in English language but in their other subjects. And , this is no reason than the fact that English language in Nigeria today is the language of text-books and the language of instruction in schools. When students' proficiency in English language is high, it will definitely affect and improve the academic performance of such students [3].

In view of the above therefore, the findings of this research work also corroborate with the findings of the above authors on students' English language proficiency relationship with academic performance in Science and Technical Education. This is because English language has been influenced over students' performance in vocational education courses. This is no reason than the fact that knowledge in students' fields is documented in English. Thus, in a formal school setting there is need to emphasize on high proficiency in English language as this will invariably affect their performance generally in other subjects.

That aside, it was also revealed that there was no significant difference based on gender in English and in the English of Agricultural science and Economic education students. This again agreed with another study on the basis of gender, where it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in reading comprehension skills among senior secondary school students in Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State [10].

One could thus inferred from the fore-going that anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the whole world without leaving his own house [4] which no doubt have positive impact on academic performance of students in all fields. No wonder why [5] firmly stated that if under sentimental urge, we give up English; we will cut ourselves off from knowledge.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

English language is very important to any course in the Nigeria education system especially on vocational education courses as revealed in this research. [8] confirmed this when he said English language is a powerful factor to be considered based on students' academic performance in Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics. To this effect, findings in this research revealed that English language also influenced students' academic performance in vocational education. Students' academic performance based on gender in English and in the English of Agricultural science and Economics education courses revealed that there was no significant difference in students' academic performance.

The following recommendations were therefore suggested based on the findings of this research work that;

1. There is need to improve the teaching of English language to improve vocational education in a formal school setting.
2. English language should be central to what students will learn in general studies upon their admission into vocation education courses.
3. All students in secondary school should be counseled to take English language very seriously irrespective of their courses.
4. Colleges should encourage students to improve on their language and communication skills alongside communicative competence and boldness.

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