
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR COMPREHENSION OF SOME CONCEPTS IN ECONOMICS.

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Abstract

The study was carried out to examine the relationship between English language proficiency and comprehension of concepts in Economics by secondary school students. The study was prompted by the massive failure recorded in both NECO and WAEC that covers all the subjects in the curriculum including Economics. The sample of the study consisted of 200 secondary school students who were in their SS two. The sample was randomly selected from two private schools in Gombe local government area of Gombe state. The choice of these schools was informed by the popular assumptions that students in private schools receive good teaching and perform relatively better than their counterparts in the public schools. The instrument used for data collection was teacher made tests prepared by the researcher. The tests were administered on the sample at the end of their third term after all the teaching and revisions for the term took place. After the tests, the scores obtained in both English language and Economics were recorded and correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Regression Analysis. The outcome of the analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship (0.699) between English language proficiency and comprehension of concepts in Economics. Based on the outcome of the study, it was recommended that the teaching and learning of English language should receive the required attention because without the good mastery of the language skills, the learning of concepts in Economics and indeed the learning of other subjects in the curriculum would be very difficult.

Introduction

Economics is classified in the (FGN, 2008) as a non-vocational elective. It appears to be one of the most popular subjects in this category of Senior Secondary School non vocational subjects as it is the subject most students select voluntarily. This, perhaps, may be because of the importance of the subject as a core subject in social science and business studies. A scrutiny of the Unified Tertiary Institutions Matriculation Examination Board (UTME) brochure (2012) reveals that admission into Nigeria higher institutions of learning (University, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education) to study courses in the fields of administration, business studies, social science and other related areas require a minimum of credit level pass in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (or its equivalents) in Economics and most often as one of the four University Matriculation examination subjects that must be sat and passed.

This, no doubt, portrays the crucial nature of Economics in the curriculum of secondary schools and indeed tertiary institutions. It is a subject that is offered virtually in all secondary schools irrespective of whether it is science, arts or vocational based school. Most students offer it in senior secondary school level and sit for its examination in NECO,

WAEC and other standard examinations. It is also a subject that gives room for science students' swap to other combinations when they cannot get credit passes in the sciences. The level of performance of students in subject in WAEC and NECO examinations, like in other subjects, is so poor that it becomes a serious concern to parents, teachers and all other stakeholders in education.

Adewuyi (2000) posited that students fail in Economics because they lack proper understanding of the basic concepts in the subject as well as being unable to answer questions properly. He further argues that like all other social science subjects, Economics involves learning of concepts and that a good mastery of concepts is a function of the clarity and good use of the language of instruction. In recent years, researchers have examined the relationship between language proficiency and such various areas as intelligence, aptitude, and language skills. Many other scholars try to link English language proficiency with students' academic performance in most school subjects. Garcia-Vasquez, Vazquez, Lopez, & Ward (1997) compared the reading achievement scores of Hispanic middle and high school students with measures of their proficiency in English and found that the highest correlations were between English proficiency and English academic

achievement ($r = 0.84$). Lower, significant correlations were observed between Spanish reading and English reading ($r = 0.24$), and no correlation was found between Spanish proficiency and English academic achievement ($r = 0.03$).

Similarly, Stevens, Butler & Castellon-Wellington (2000) investigated the relationship between the language and performance of seven-grade English language learners on two tests- a language proficiency test and a standardized achievement test. They stated that the correspondence between the languages of the two tests was limited. In their contribution, Bayliss and Raymond (2004) examined the link between academic success and second language proficiency in the context of two professional programs. They conducted two studies. First, they investigated the link between ESL scores on an advanced ESL test and the grade point average (GPA) obtained over two semesters. Second, they investigated the link between French second language scores on an advanced L2 test and both the number of courses failed and the first semester GPA. Looking at the aforementioned analysis, one may therefore wonder if the problem of underachievement in Economics may not go beyond the subject and extend it to communication skills in English language. It is this background that prompted this investigation which is designed to find if there is relationship between students' language proficiency and their performance in Economics.

Statement of the Problem.

One of the most serious problems that students face in their field of study is their inability to communicate and handle English during and after graduating from university. Maleki and Zangani (2007) observed that this is due to their weaknesses in General English, which influences their academic success. They further maintain that having difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the course given in the target language seems to be one of the most serious problems that students face in their particular course of study. This might be due to their weaknesses in General English, which may have a drastic impact on their academic success. There are odds against the Nigerian students in learning English. The poor performance of Nigerian senior secondary school students in various school subjects at public examinations has been blamed on their weakness in English language which is the medium through which knowledge in school subjects is transferred to learners (Fakeye and Ogunsiji, 2009). Majority of secondary school students in Nigeria already have various mother tongues before they are admitted into school. The use of English as a language of instructions in schools and the need for all students to learn all the subjects in the curriculum

through it as well as write qualifying examinations, this poses great challenges and difficulties to the schools and the students. It is realization of this, that this study was designed to examine the relationship that exists between the English language proficiency of students and their comprehension ability in learning concepts in Economics.

Objectives of the study.

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between English Language proficiency of secondary school students and their comprehension of some concepts in Economics. It was designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. Find out the relationship between students' English language proficiency and their comprehension of concepts in Economics; and,
2. Find out the extent to which students' comprehension of concepts in Economics could be attributed to their English language proficiency.

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between students' English language proficiency and their comprehension of concepts in Economics.

Ho₂: The extent to which English language proficiency affect students' comprehension of concepts in Economics is not significant.

Methodology

The study was a correlation that examined the relationship between the English language proficiency of senior secondary school students and their comprehension of concepts in Economics. Post test only experiment research design was used. The population of the study consisted of all students in private secondary schools that were in SS II and were offering Economics. A sample of two hundred students randomly selected from two private secondary schools in Gombe L.G.A. was used in the study. The sample consisted of one hundred senior secondary school students that were in their SS two in each these schools. Teacher made achievement tests in English language and Economics were used as the instruments for data collection in the study. The English language test was designed to test language proficiency level of the students while the test in Economics tested the comprehension level of the students on some concepts in the subject. The tests were validated by specialists in both English language and Economics from the General Studies and Accounting Education departments of the Federal College of Education (Technical) Gombe. The inputs received from them were used to improve the quality of the tests and to meet content validity.

A test-retest method was used to determine the reliability level of the tests and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was run to determine the coefficient of relationship between the first and second administration. The reliability tests yielded the coefficient value of 0.80 which was considered good for the study. The study lasted for a period of the second term of 2010/2011 academic session in which the students were taught English language and Economics following the syllabus prescribed for senior secondary schools. The teaching sessions of the study were carried out by the respective teachers of the subjects in the schools and were supervised by the researchers.

At the end of the term, the two sets of tests were administered on the subjects as posttests by the teachers who taught the students under the supervision of the researchers. The English language proficiency test was marked by following the

marking scheme which distributed the marks reflecting organization, mechanical accuracy, expression and content. While the achievement test in Economics was marked following the marking scheme that reflected expression and content. The scores obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine degree of relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of the students in Economics. In addition, Linear Regression Analysis was carried out to determine the level at which English language proficiency influence students' achievement in Economics at 0.05 significant levels.

Results

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between English Language proficiency and Senior Secondary School students' achievement in Economics.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient showing the relationship between English Language Proficiency level and achievement in Economics.

Variable	N	Mean	Std D	R	P	Remarks
English Language Proficiency Test Score	200	68.87	48.21	0.699	000	Significant
Economics Achievement test score	200	58.44	43.08			

Table 1 revealed that there was a significant relationship between English Language proficiency and students' achievement in Economics ($r=0.699$) $p<0.05$. This implies that the more students are proficient in English Language, the more they comprehend concepts in Economics and the more

they perform well in an achievement test in the subject.

Ho₂: The extent to which English language proficiency affect students' comprehension of concepts in Economics is not significant.

Table 2: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis showing the Students' Level of English Language Proficiency.

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Model	F	Remark
Independent Variable				Regression Residual	19.0	Significant
English Language	0.58	0.562	0.508			

Table 2 revealed the coefficient of determination (Adjusted R²) = 0.562 and it gave the proportion of variance to be 40.8 percent. This implies that about 40.8 percent of the chances of the students to perform well in Economics were determined by the level of their proficiency in English language. The table showed that the effect of the English language proficiency on the performance of students in Economics was also significant $F(1.199) = 19.0$ $P < 0.5$. Therefore, it could be concluded that about 41 percent of the chances of passing Economics with good grades depends on their level of English language proficiency. It further implies that the effect of English language proficiency in influencing the learning of concepts in Economics was significant.

Findings of the Study.

Based on the data collected and analyzed in the study, the following findings were made:

1. There was a significant relationship between the proficiency in English language skill and the students' performance in Economics. This positive relation implies that the more proficient students are in English language skill the better the performance of such students in Economics.
2. About forty one (40.8) percent of chances of the students to perform well in Economics was determined by the level of their English language proficiency.

Discussions of the findings.

The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between English

language skills of students and their performance in Economics ($r = 0.699$). This suggested that as English language proficiency level of the students improved, it influences their performance in Economics. This finding supported the views of researchers that there is correlation between proficiency in the language of instruction and academic performance of students. Rollnick (2000) showed that learners with low English language proficiency have a much poorer understanding of non technical terms and everyday words than of technical words and concepts, which lead them misinterpret and misunderstand Science and Mathematics. It also corroborated the position reported by Carlson (2000) cited in Zakaria and Abd Aziz (2011) that it is not the technical terms that make academic language so difficult for learners, but rather it is the functional words and common, familiar English words that give most difficulty to learners with low English language proficiency students because teachers assume students already know them.

Similarly, the studies of (Hamilah 2003; Sarojini and Algaratnam, 2003; and Abedi, Leo, & Mirocha, 2000) are supported by this study. They all indicated that there is a strong relationship between English language proficiency and performance of students in different academic subjects. This study further showed that proficiency in English language skill does have a significant impact on senior secondary school student's performance in some concepts in Economics $F(12.198) = 19.0$ ($P < 0.5$). This also supported the findings of Maleki and Zangani (2007) which revealed a significant relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement (GPA). The correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores was 0.48. This suggested that as English proficiency increases, so does academic success. In other words, there is a positive correlation between the two variables.

The present study confirmed the recent findings of Zakaria and Abd Aziz (2011) which revealed that English language was one of several factors that contribute to students' performance in Mathematics. They reported that students experienced challenges brought about by the medium of instruction and they thus argued that to be successful in Mathematics achievement, students have focus on learning the language of instruction first before they could learn Mathematics content.

Implication of the Study

The study has some implications to the teaching - learning process in general and that of Economics in particular.

1. The study showed that English language proficiency determines the achievement of students in Economics and by extension their achievements in other subjects in the school. It implies therefore that the entire academic achievement of the students depends on their English language proficiency.
2. Since the English language proficiency of the students in our schools today is generally low, it means that they may find it difficult to comprehend instructions that take place in the language. This means therefore that comprehension would be hindered because of the poor proficiency in the language of instruction and hence it would affect the performance of students in examination and indeed in work place.
3. If about 40 percent chances of students to perform good in Economics depends of their language proficiency, it means that about 40 percent of the students who offer the subject in the our secondary schools would not pass it well. This further implies that 40 percent of chances of the students would not go to the universities and other tertiary institutions to study Economics and Economics related fields and thus the society would be short of workforce in these areas by 40 percent.

Conclusion

Based on the outcome of the study, it would be concluded that English language proficiency and indeed communication skills significantly affect the teaching and learning of Economics specifically and that of other subjects in the curriculum generally. This suggests that English language being the language of the school, in which all academic activities are carried out in, plays significant role in the life of the schools. Therefore, success in all academic endeavours in the schools depends on it.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that the school and indeed all stakeholders in education should as a matter of urgency and necessity initiate and develop programmes, activities and policies that would improve the teaching and learning of English language both as a subject and as a language of instructions. This is in order to improve the proficiency level of the students thereby preparing them for effective learning of all the subjects in the school.

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