Full Length Research Paper

A correlated analysis of students' SSCE grade and performance in first year Use-of-English: A case study of Fountain University, Osogbo

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As a result of globalization, there has been need for people of varying backgrounds to interact at both the official and unofficial levels and certain languages such as English, French, German and Arabic have become second languages in many communities of the world, where they serve as languages of communication, interaction and relationships. Nigeria, being a British colony, adopted the English Language as its official language and invariably, a second language to its citizenry. English is therefore taught as a subject at all levels of the Nigerian educational system. This study examined the correlation between performances in two of these levels; school certificate level and first year the University level. Using Fountain University, Osogbo as a case study, secondary data from the students' records and their performances in the Use of English examinations were used. A total of one hundred and ninety four students were used. Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, the study revealed no correlation between the SSCE grades and the Use of English scores. Therefore, the performance at the school certificate level could not be used to predict the performance at the university level. The study also revealed that students who attended private secondary schools (35%) are those that have high mean performance. The performance of the students of the natural and applied sciences was better than those of the social sciences. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Post-JAMB testing should focus mainly on English Language testing. English Language should be one of the compulsory subjects for admission into tertiary institutions. Finally, there should be intensified efforts on the teaching of English Language at the secondary levels.

Key words: English Language, globalization, second-language, official-language.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of communication between people in form of written or spoken. It is the chief means by which the human personality expresses itself and fulfills its basic needs for social interaction with other persons. In corroborating the importance of language as a human heritage, Labo-Popoola (2010) noted that there has been an increasing need for people to interact at both official and unofficial levels as a result of globalization. This need has also made different nations to opt for a common language. Stemming from this, English Language became the official language for Nigeria because the country was colonized by the British. This translated to using the language, English, both at home and in the office.

The ability to speak and understand English is mandatory on certain fields, professions and occupations.

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Graddol (1997) noted that English is so widely spoken that it is referred to as the "lingua franca" of the modern era. It is the language of international business, politics and commerce. It is the dominant language in communications, science, aviation, entertainment and radio.

Consequent upon this importance, English Language is taught at all levels of education in Nigeria as a second language. Nigerian students have to contend with English Language at all levels. For any student to be considered as having passed the Senior School Certificate examination (SSCE), he must have passed English Language and Mathematics at credit level. His power of competence in English Language is assessed, especially when it has to do with sitting and passing examination. The Nigerian student is exposed to the language as a subject from the first year in pre-primary or primary school. He is consciously taught the language for six years in the primary school, six years in the secondary school and one year in the tertiary institution.

Having been exposed to the language for a minimum of twelve years, one expects a very good performance from the students in all subjects since the subjects are taught and examined in English Language except the Nigerian languages. Some secondary schools even have an unwritten rule that for a student to be promoted from Senior School One to Senior School Two, he must have passed English Language at credit level. Despite this long exposure and conditions, the students' performance in the subject has continually dropped. Ayodele (1988), Obemeata (1995) and Labo-Popoola (2002) have all noted that students' performance in English Language at the SSCE level is very poor. The recently released 2010 Senior School Certificate Examination conducted by the National Examination Council (NECO) results showed that only 2% of the total candidates that sat for the examination passed with five credits passes including English Language.

Ironically, this poor performance in the subject has led to poor performance in the overall performance of students academically. This observation confirms the position of Jones (1970), who postulated that academic failure is language failure. In the case of Nigeria, a student who has not grasped the basic rudiments of English Language may find it difficult expressing himself in the language. This is likely to affect his performance negatively in some other subjects in which he has to express himself.

In order to ensure success at the school certificate level, many parents decide to enroll their children in schools where they are almost sure that their children will have good results. Parents, therefore, have the choice of sending their children to schools of their own choice. The options available in Nigeria include state schools, which are usually regarded as public schools and privately owned schools. Many researchers have found out that parents opt for the private schools in order to obtain better results so that the children can get on better in life

(Fox, 1985; Johnson, 1987 quoted in Labo-Popoola, 2002). The general belief is that private schools are academically and socially selective because they charge fees.

As a result of students' inabilities to express themselves very well at the tertiary level, the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) introduced English Language as a compulsory subject/course in all higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. The NUC Benchmark stipulates that all undergraduates must offer and pass Use of English before graduation (NUC, BMAS). The course is not limited to federal/state universities. The private universities are also compelled to offer the course. The Course is situated in the General Studies Unit, which also houses other courses such as Use of Library, Agriculture and Rural Development, Information and Communication Technology, etc. The purpose of introducing this course was to ensure that undergraduates are well groomed in the art of speaking and writing in English Language.

Usually, the course, Use of English, is introduced to the undergraduates in their first year of admission. The course content focuses mainly on the four language skills. Ordinarily, the content resembles that of the school certificate class. The main topics include grammatical units, listening skills (vowels, consonants, stress and intonation), speaking skills (effective ways in delivering speech), reading skills (studying techniques, methods of reading, reading speeds, deficiencies in reading), summary and comprehension skills, and also writing skills (forms of writing such as reports, review, articles, essays). Despite the relationship between the two course contents, many students (undergraduates) manage to pass the course, Use of English. One wonders why the situation is like this. If a student has a credit pass in English Language at the SSCE level, he should not find the course, Use of English, difficult.

The speaking and writing abilities of some University graduates have not shown they actually passed English Language at the SSCE level. Casual observations at how this course is taught in some universities revealed that many universities offer the course as just one course in the first semester of the session for all newly admitted students. Using Fountain University, Osogbo as a case study, this study investigated the possible existence of a relationship between students' SSCE grades and their level of performance in Use of English. The study looked at variations in students' performances across the two colleges of the University as well as the role played by the type of school (public or private) attended by the students.

The following hypotheses were generated to provide answers to the problem:

1. There is no correlation between the students SSCE grades and Use of English scores.
2. There is no variation in performance of students across

Table 1. Student enrolment on college bases.

College	Male	Female	Total
COMAS	51	68	119
CONAS	40	35	75
TOTAL	91	103	194

the two colleges.

METHODOLOGY

Research site

Fountain University, Osogbo, a private university owned by the Nasrullahi Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) has two Colleges – College of Management and Social Sciences (COMAS) and College of Natural and Applied Sciences (CONAS). At the University, the course, Use of English, is taught in both first and second semesters of the session to all the first year students. The course, tagged GNS 101, treats all the grammatical units of English Language, listening and speaking skills. In the second semester, GNS 102 as it is called, deals with the reading and writing skills; comprehension and summary skills; etc. As part of the content of GNS 102, students are expected to read and appreciate a literary text (FUO, GNS Handbook). The study made use of 194 students comprising 91 male students and 103 female students.

Source: Survey data

From Table 1, the study showed that there are more students in the College of Management and Social Sciences (119) than the College of Natural and Applied Sciences (75).

Collection of data

The data used were secondary in nature because the scores were taken from their respective files. The data used for the study were:

a. SSCE grades in English Language
b. Use of English scores
c. The type of school – Public or Private

For easy computation of the correlation, the Use of English scores and the school certificate grades were given weights as reflected in Table 2.
    Table 2 was computed by the researcher in order to bring the SSCE scores and Use of English scores onto the same level. Therefore, from the table, a student with A1 at the SSCE level has 6 points (weights) and a student scoring 70% and above also has 6 points (weights).

Data analysis

The data were subjected to correlation analysis using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation to ascertain if there was any relationship between the two sets of scores. The correlation coefficient r was converted to students-t-distribution to determine the significant difference in the performances of the students ($p < 0.05$). To obtain information on the variation across colleges, the Use of English scores were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to obtain

the mean performance as well as the standard deviation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 shows the analysis of respondents on school type across the two colleges. 29.4% of the Management Science students attended private schools while 44% of the Natural and Applied science students attended private schools. From the summary on the table, the study found out that majority of the students (65%) attended public secondary school. Based on the school type attended, the following research hypotheses were considered:

Research hypothesis 1: There is no correlation between the students' SSCE grades and Use of English scores.

Tables 4a and 4b show the correlation matrix for all students on college basis. The study investigated the relationship between the students' scores in English Language at the SSCE level and their scores in Use of English. Table 4a showed that the coefficient value r is 0.078, which signifies no correlation value. Thus, for all students in the university, there is no correlation between the two sets of scores. This goes to say that the grade in SSCE English Language cannot be used to predict performance in the university course, Use of English. Table 4b shows the correlation analysis between Use of English scores and the SSCE grades in English Language for the two Colleges, COMAS and CONAS. The correlation coefficient for COMAS is 0.089 while that of the CONAS is 0.05. With these values, the hypothesis is hereby accepted that there is no relationship between the Use of English scores obtained at the university level and the scores of school certificate in English Language. This goes to say that the fact that a student passes English Language at the SSCE level does not mean he will do well in the Use of English at the university level.

Research hypothesis 2: There is no variation in performance of students across the two colleges.

Table 5 shows the mean performance as well as the standard deviation (SD) of students in respective of their scores in Use of English. For the Management students, the mean performance of students, who attended private secondary schools, in Use of English is 3.65 and the SD is 0.99. This signifies that many students passed the course as the SD is high. The mean performance of students with public school background is 3.5 which fall short of that of the private school group (3.65). Again, the standard deviation is high (1.20), which indicates a high level of variation among the scores. It is likely many students have the borderline scores here. One can safely

Table 2. Conversion of SSCE grades and use of English scores to weights.

	6	5	4	3	2	1
SSCE grades	A1	B2	B3	C4	C5	C6
Use of Eng. scores (%)	70-100	60-69	50-59	45-49	40-44	Below 40%

Table 3. Analysis on school type basis across the college.

College	Private	Public	Total
COMAS	35(29.4%)	84(70.6%)	119
CONAS	33(44%)	42(56%)	75
TOTAL	68(35.1%)	126(64.9%)	194

Source: Survey data

Table 4a. Correlation between the school certificate grades and students' performance in use of English.

	N	Corr. (r)	t-score	Level of significance
X	194	0.078	1.08	
Y	194			0.05

Source: Survey data.

Table 4b. Correlation between the school certificate grades and students' performance in use of English on college basis.

	N	Corr. (r)	t-score	Level of significance
COMAS	119	0.089	0.96	
CONAS	75	0.05	0.43	0.05

Source: Survey data

Table 5. Mean performance of students across college in relation to school type.

	Private		Public	
	COMAS	CONAS	COMAS	CONAS
Mean	3.65	3.69	3.5	3.62
Standard Deviation	0.99	1.10	1.2	1.17

Source: Survey data.

conclude here that the students that attended private secondary schools have the tendency to perform better than those who attended public secondary schools. In the College of Natural and Applied Sciences, the students that attended public schools have a mean performance of 3.62 while those that attended private schools have 3.69. The standard deviation is also very close, 1.17 and 1.10 respectively. The inference that could be drawn here is that a pure Science student will perform well in English Language, irrespective of the type of school that he attends.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study have corroborated some other studies like that of Olofinsawe Akin (2007), Kolawole (1989), Adeyeye and Olojo (1996). Olofinsawe reported a low relationship between school certificate grades in English Language and FUTA grades in Information Retrieval Course. Adeyeye and Olojo (1996) also found that the school certificate grades in Mathematics are a weak predictor of college achievement performance. The revelation has certain implications for the educational system. The implication is that these students cannot defend their scores/grades in English Language. The inability to defend may be due to the manner in which they acquire those grades in the first instance. It is a well-known fact that the SSC examinations are usually characterized by series of examination malpractices which they could not perpetrate at the university level.

Another finding from this study is that the type of school attended has some effect on the performance of students. It was discovered that students who attended private secondary schools performed better than their counterparts who attended the public schools; however, for the CONAS students, the school-type has little or no effect on their performance. The study also revealed that the pure and applied science (CONAS) students exhibited better performance than the management science (COMAS) students in the university.

The following recommendations are suggested:

i. The internal examinations conducted by various universities should lay more emphasis on English Language testing in order to ascertain their performance at the SSCE level;
ii. Government should intensify its efforts in making public schools more attractive.

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