

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERFORMANCE OF LANGUAGE MAJOR AND VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN GENERAL ENGLISH COURSES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIAN COLLEGES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigates, by way of comparison, the performance level in GSE English Courses, offered by students majoring in Language Combinations and those majoring in Vocational and Technical Education combinations. These GSE English courses are otherwise known as “Use of English” in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In Colleges of Education, they are referred to as ‘General English I, II, III, IV and V. The study sets out to affirm whether field of study and duration of course do impact positively or otherwise in student’s learning outcome. Raw percentage scores of the same sets of 120 students who sat for the GSE English courses in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 were proportionally and purposively sampled in every course combinations in the Schools of Languages and Vocational and Technical Education at the Lanlate Campus of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo. The data was subjected to t-test analysis at 0.05 significant level and the results from the two tested hypotheses indicate that there is a significant difference in the performance level of the two groups in the 13/14/sessionally offered GSE English courses but was not so for 12/13 sessional courses. It was therefore recommended among others that lecturers teaching GSE English courses should vary their approaches and methods of teaching to suit students who do not major in Languages, especially, as they transit from one level to another.*

**KEYWORDS:** Performance level, Field of study, Duration of course.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

English Language in Nigeria has been a fulcrum of national integration among diverse tongues of distinct languages. To this end, therefore, English Language has become and still is a language of education, commerce, government business, parliamentary, judiciary and social interaction in all spheres of human endeavour in Nigeria. It is therefore noteworthy that for the purpose of learning achievement and professional pursuit only, a credit pass in English is desirable. Also, a credit pass in English is compulsory before an applicant can secure admission to tertiary institutions in the country. Infact, upon entry into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, a course tagged ‘Use of English’ has to be compulsorily passed before graduation by all prospective graduates.

At the NCE level, ‘Use of English’ carries 6 credit units spread over the three year course duration for all teachers-in-training. This is informed by the objectives of the NCE curriculum designers who want to ensure that all teachers in Nigeria, whose minimum entry point into the teaching profession is NCE, are communicatively and proficiently sound in the Use of English. Thus, “Use of English” as a course in Nigeria Colleges of Education is tagged ‘General English’ in the Department of General Studies in Education (GSE). Therefore, the 6 credit units

for NCE undergraduates are spread over the following English Courses: GSE 111, GSE 121, GSE 211, GSE 221 and GSE 321 for three year NCE programme. The course contents of these aforementioned courses ensure a mastery of English Language Grammar, Literature (prose, poetry and drama textual samples), Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills. But as functional and relevant as the curriculum of the courses are to meet the communicative needs of the prospective NCE graduates, yet, the performance level of the students is all time low.

The situation in the country today has shown a gradual decline in the performance of students in English Language examination in public examination bodies like NECO and WAEC and this phenomenon still rears its ugly head in all our tertiary institutions, including Universities and Polytechnics. For instance, WAEC Chief Examiners Report in English Language in 2010 states "... This paper was well within the experience of the candidates ... with those set in previous years. The candidates' performance however, was generally disappointing". In the Federal Radio announcement of Tuesday, 11th August 2015, WAEC announced that of over one million candidates that sat for the Senior Secondary Examination, in May/June, 2015, 61% of them failed English and Mathematics. Thus, the general assumption in the country today is that this mass failure in English could be traced to products of our tertiary institutions where the use of English is being taught, yet their performance could not commensurate with the desired objectives. It is further argued that undergraduates who are not specialising in English are even worse off in the Use of English than those who are Language majors. Thus, Anyadiegwu (2012) cited in Aina and Olanipekun (2014) concludes: 'it is no more a hidden fact that students admitted into our Universities and other tertiary institutions are quite deficient in the use of English'.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have exhaustively researched into locating where the problem of low performance in the use of English lies. It has been once asserted that a positive attitude of a learner towards the learning of English, especially, in the second Language situation, has always yielded a positive learning outcome. For instance, Samar Rukh (2014) noted that most students in tertiary institutions developed a positive attitude towards the study of English because they see the Language complimenting their achievement in all other academic work. On this, Vizconde (2006) noticed that a positive achievement in science and mathematics by student-teachers in Philippine was due largely to using English to teach certain courses along with a Filipino language. Bamgbose (2001) as cited in Aina and Olanipekun (2014) even sees a carrier prospect as a factor of inducing positive attitudes among students of Business studies in the learning of English. For instance, Bamgbose found out that Business students believe that they will globally be relevant if they are communicatively proficient in English because the nature of their job required more interaction globally. In Malaysia, out of nationalistic fervour in 2009, a controversial decision was taken by Malaysian Government that instruction on science and mathematics should be in local language and no more in English. This decision was widely repudiated by Malaysian parents who see the abandonment of English for a local language as capable of restricting their children from global labour market and private sector. Chin (2009) captured the mood of the parents' dilemma in the country thus: "A lot of Malaysian parents are very worried about the standard of English, for their children, without English they can't survive, not in the private sector".

Bottery (2004) in Samar Rukh (2014) also noted globalization effect as a watershed to the learning of English among non-native speakers; and as more and more global English becomes, it will continue to be positively linked to academic achievement in most third world countries.

Also, there has always been an attempt to link attitudes of learners to English among non-major students. For instance, Ju Lin and Warden (1998) noted that there was a statistically significant differences in attitudes towards English learning amongst students in Management majors who they said have better English ability than those in other non-majors. For example, they noted that students who are Design Majors were even 'very difficult to teach' and often attained a 'very low English level'.

In the same vein, Aina and Olanipekun (2014) linked a good performance in Physics to English language and that academic performance in GSE English Language is not gender related. However, Adebajo (2012) concluded in her descriptive survey study that students who are from the Schools of Science and Vocational and Technical Education performed better in GSE English courses than those in the Schools of Arts and Languages. But Mohammed, Majid and Hannah (2012) seem to sum up all aforementioned findings when they concluded in their study that demographic profiles of field of study, gender, duration of study, opinions, beliefs etc have a way of impacting positively or negatively on students' attitudes to English Language learning. They specifically noted a high statistically significant attitudinal difference as regards gender and field of study with Libyan secondary school students specializing in Basic sciences, Life sciences and Social sciences showing a negative attitude to English learning in terms of 'cognitive, behavioural and emotional variables'.

So with this background of diverse opinions on performance on English Language learning among students of institutions, the paper seeks to investigate the performance of students of Language Majors and those of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in GSE English courses for at least two years or sessions and trace the differences in their performance to year of duration as they transit from one level to another rather than field of study per se.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study seeks to find out whether intensity of learning as students proceed from one level to another, especially, among NCE undergraduates tends to bring about a higher achievement in General English Studies. The study is relevant because it was the New Minimum Standard for NCE Teachers (2009) by the NCCE that stipulated a three year duration for the study of "Use of English" which erstwhile was for two years. One of the objectives of the New NCE Curriculum that accorded the use of English Studies a new status of three year duration is to ensure that graduating teachers who are knowledgeable and proficient in the Use of English system are employed. Such graduating NCE teachers are, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria Minimum Standard for NCE Teachers (2009), expected to 'participate meaningfully in discussion covering a wide spectrum of disciplines and state, explain and critically analyze the national objectives and ..... to acquire a proficiency in the use of English Language for effective Communication'. The questions then arise; Do students performance in the use of English Studies justify the increase in the year of duration? Can their performance be progressively determined regardless of their field of studies?

## **Statement of the Problem**

It has been observed and asserted that gradual decline in the performance of students in English is prevalent in Nigeria tertiary institutions despite all efforts to stem the tide by the government. The teaching of Use of English in General Studies Education (GSE) Department in Colleges of Education, Polytechnic and Universities notwithstanding, the abysmal performance is still critically noticed. It is therefore, the thrust of this paper to add to the existing Literatures that students' performance tends to improve significantly as they proceed from one level to another regardless of field of study. Thus, intensity of learning, year-in-year-out, can resort to a positive learning achievement.

## **Population**

The population of this study comprises all the 961 candidates of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Lanlate Campus, who took part in the GSE English courses Examinations written in 2012/2013 and 897 candidates in 2013/2014 sessions.

## **Hypotheses**

To guide the study, two null hypotheses are generated from the statements of the problem thus:

Hoi: There is no significant difference in the performance of students of Language major and those of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in GSE English Courses.

Hoi: There is no significant improvement in the performance of students of Language major and those of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in GSE English Courses as they transit from one level to another by year of duration.

## **Research Design and Sampling Technique**

The data for this descriptive study are the raw percentage scores of students in Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Lanlate Campus. Examination scores in four out of five courses in general English in GSE Department serve as data for the study. The courses had been examined in 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 sessions. The courses are GSE 111, GSE 121, GSE 211 and GSE 221 assigned with one credit load except GSE 221 carrying two credit load. Proportional and purposive random sampling techniques were adopted to draw the sample for the study in such a way that enables every course combination in the two Schools of Languages and Vocational and Technical Education to be represented. In the same vein, the samples were carefully drawn to ensure that the percentage scores of the same set of students who sat for the courses in 2012/2013 and transited to 2013/2014 were drawn from the two Schools. 50% of candidates in every course combination were sampled such that in the School of Languages, 13 samples were drawn from English/Social Studies, 21 from English/Political Science, 12 from English/Yoruba and 5,3,4 and 2 from English/Christian Religious Studies, English/Islamic Religious Studies, English/French and Yoruba/French respectively totaling 60 candidates in all. The same process was adopted for the School of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE). The following course combinations in the School of Vocational and technical Education and the percentage scores of candidates who sat for the four GSE English courses in the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 were drawn proportionally for the study thus: 18, 28, 9 and 5 from Agricultural Science (Double Major), Business Education (Double Major), Technical Education and Fine and Applied Arts respectively. In all, percentage scores of the same 120 candidates who sat for GSE 111, 121, 211 and 221 during the 2012/2013 and

2013/2014 sessions serve as data for this study. This will enable us to adequately determine the academic achievement of the candidates progressively as they transit from one session to another in line with the hypotheses for this study.

### Reliability of the Data

The questions and the percentage scores of candidates who sat for the courses from which the data was drawn had been internally and externally modified before being adopted for the study.

### Validity of the Data

The distribution of the samples into Schools and course combination was given a face-value validity as meeting the required set objective of the study. Senior Lecturers who specialize in test and measurement in the College validate the data. Their suggestions were considered in drawing the samples for the study.

### Method of data Analysis

The data was subjected to t-test statistics to examine the two hypotheses drawn for this study at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

### Analysis and Discussion

Hoi: There is no significant difference in the performance of students of Language major and those of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in NCE GSE English Courses by field of study.

**Table I:** t-test of differences in the performance of students of Schools of Languages and Vocational and Technical Education in NCE GSE English courses in part I of 2012/2013 session.

Session	Group	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
12/13	Languages	60	48.40	11.91	118	-6.160	1.98	Not significant
	Vocational & Technical Education	60	50.05	16.68				

Source: Students' mark sheets on GSE 111 and GSE 112 in 2012/2013 session

Not Significant at 0.05

The above table shows that the calculated t-test is lower with -6.160 than the table value of 1.98 at 0.05 significant level, hence, the hypotheses is therefore accepted. This implies that the performance of students of Language major in their first year of admission cannot be rated above that of students of Vocational and Technical Education. In fact, from the above table, the mean value of 50.08 for students of Vocational and Technical Education is only a little above that of students of Language major with 48.40 index. This finding negates Adebajo's conclusion that only students in science and technical courses in Colleges of Education often do well in GSE English Courses than those in the School of Languages. What must have informed this negation could be due to the different set of students in a particular session that was being studied. That is, intelligent level and attitudes of students to English studies varies according to differences in their years of admission and not necessarily by field of study. Our

conclusion here, therefore, is that measuring academic performance in English Language of students in tertiary institutions should systematically begin in their first year of admission in order to sustain their level of performance and interest without bias as to differences in field of study.

The questions then arise: Will VTE students sustain this same level of performance in English studies as they transit to other academic session? Will Language major students who will now be more grounded in Language courses in their various departments improve on this first year attainment in GSE English courses? These are the posers that the next Hypothesis seeks to answer.

Hoi: There is no significant improvement in the performance of students of Language major and Vocational and Technical education (VTE) in GSE English courses as they transit from one level to another.

**Table II:** t-test of differences in the performance of students of School of Languages and Vocational and Technical Education in NCE GSE English courses in part II of 2013/2014 session.

Session	Group	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
13/14	Languages	60	57.77	12.70	118	2.764	1.98	Significant
	Vocational & Technical Education	60	49.17	17.10				

*Source:* students' mark sheets on GSE 211 and GSE 221 in 2013/2014 session

Significant at 0.05 Level

From the table above, since the calculated t-test of 2.764 is higher than the table value of 1.98, the hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis upheld. By this, it means that as students proceed from one level to another in tertiary institutions, particularly in Colleges of Education, the performance in academic achievements in GSE English courses tends to improve significantly for students in the School of Languages than those in the School of Vocational and Technical Education. The higher level of performance of students of Language major which is tremendously better than that of students of Vocational and Technical Education as noted in their means above can be linked to attitudes which tend to be positively enhanced in tertiary institutions as students transit from one level to another. They continue to ascribe higher importance to their field of study than other courses that have no direct link to their disciplines. For students in the School of languages, they are now positively disposed to do well in GSE English courses in Part II because in their various departments, they are now more exposed to courses in English Language skills and Literature at a deeper level which thus complement English lessons in GSE English courses at this level. This fact is supported by Alderson (2002) as cited in Aina and Olanipekun (2014) who noted that English readers or learners in a second language setting are not able to perform effectively in a foreign language learning until 'they reach a threshold of linguistic level before they engage in reading.' In fact, as students in colleges of education proceed from one level to another, they tend to attach a lower value to GSE English courses which they regard as minor courses that add little or no value to their fields of study. This paper therefore submits that as students in tertiary institutions, especially, those in colleges of education, proceed or transit from one academic year to another, they tend to develop negative attitudes to General English Courses, with only those in Language

Education positively disposed to General English Studies. One can then conclude that students' performance in GSE English courses cannot be determined holistically in their first year of entry until they transit to another academic year when their attitudes changed due to intensity and frequency of exposure to rudiments of English Language systems and not field of study per se. Therefore, one cannot quickly submit that a field of study a student belongs to is a determinant of higher academic achievement in the Use of English in tertiary institutions. Rather, it is a matter of individual attitudes, exposure, environment, gender, and higher intensity of frequency and quality of teaching that can make the difference (Vizconde 2006; Bamgbose, 2001; Aina and Olanipekun, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

It is our submission in this paper that students' achievements and performance in 'Use of English' in Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially in colleges of education can only be determined by field of study depending on which course they are specializing on. This will further influence their attitudes either positively or negatively, in that, those who are majoring in Languages often achieve significantly in general English Courses than those in Vocational and Technical Education departments whose exposure to rudiments of English linguistic systems becomes low as they transit from one academic session to another. But for those students in Languages, their learning intensity of English becomes higher and frequent in their various departments thus complimenting the efforts of teachers of GSE English courses. This study thus alerts the teachers in GSE English units of all the Colleges of Education to vary their approaches and methods of teaching to motivate non-major Language students towards better achievement learning outcomes in General English Studies

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Lecturers in English unit of General Studies Education (GSE) department in Colleges of Education should vary their teaching approaches and methods to develop positive attitudes towards English Studies by non-major students.
2. In the first few weeks of the first semester in the College, all students in each of the five schools in the college offering GSE English courses could be given assignments related to their disciplines – this is a need based approach that can motivate every students to see the relevance of English Studies to his/her discipline.
3. To sustain the higher achievement level noted in the performance of students of language majors and to motivate non-language major students, interactive and group learning approaches can be adopted to allow cross-fertilization of knowledge in English studies in such a way that lecturers could give assignments by mixing all the students across the five schools in Colleges of Education.
4. Some students upon entry to the college came with a grade in English that is excellent but only to be scoring low grades in GSE General English Courses. To minimize this, written test of not more than half a page should be included in the post-UTME test; for

instance, 'write a short story about a dog, goat or why you want to further your education, etc.

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