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Course content analysis of students' academic performance in General English among college students

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Abstract

The paper employed descriptive survey study of course content in General English which aimed at unfolding the analysis of students' academic performance in General English II (GSE 121), during the 2012/2013 academic session in Kwara State College of Education (Tech.) Lafiagi, Nigeria. Two hundred students were sampled for the study. Pro-forma was used to collect data from fifty (50) multiple choice questions set for the students. Frequency counts and percentage and frequency bar chart were used to analyze the data collected. It was revealed in the findings that apart from study skills (rules of spelling), students were not doing well in other topics (verb-tenses, concord, lexis and structure, auxiliary/model verb, sentence types, comprehension, antonyms, synonyms, homophones, homonyms) in the course contents. To this effect, language proficiency and communicative competence in English language is in crisis. It was recommended among others that, those topics in General English such as verb-tenses, sentence types and reading comprehension must be taught by teachers with innovative teaching methods that could bring about effective teaching.

1. Introduction

The overriding need for English, not only as the language of instruction in schools alone but also as the language of science and technology even in technically inclined institutions has resulted in its integration in the Nigeria education system at all levels. At the tertiary level, English language or General English is taught as a compulsory subject in both the science and vocational faculties. Without doubt, English is significant to the students' academic success, especially for undergraduates and post-graduate students as most of the documentations related to their fields of specialization are written in English Djihed (2013). More accurately, these learners

require English to comprehend texts written in English, which are related to their discipline.

To this effect, the essence of General English or English language can hardly be over emphasized. This corroborated with the argument of Ezeokoli (2005) and Olanipekun (2012) that English language is very crucial to the Nigeria educational system. It is not only the medium of instruction especially at the upper primary, secondary and tertiary level of education but also the language of text-books. It is through the vehicle of English language that student accessed knowledge in other subject areas. Yet, it is no more a hidden fact among concerned stakeholders in the educational sector that students' academic performance in General English is poor.

On the rostrum of academic performance, the phrase 'students' academic performance' is seen as the level of knowledge a student possesses in a particular area of study such as English language and how they have been able to cope and accomplish with it in solving various tasks. Adeyemi (2008) aptly unfolded that students' academic performance is the scholastic standing of a student at a given moment. This is also used to describe how an individual is able to demonstrate his or her intellectual abilities. The term 'scholastic standing' is explained as the grades obtained in a course or group of courses taken Daniel *et.al* (1970) & Owoyemi (2000)

Akomolafe *et.al* (2011) interestingly averred that all stakeholders in Nigeria education system today (parents, guardians, teachers, counselors, etc.) are so much concerned about students' academic performance in relation to academic standard. The result of the notion that academic performance is a virile instrument to the national development of a nation, but it is pathetic to note that students' academic performance in Nigeria is not encouraging in English language or General English.

To this end, Students' academic performance in the subject at both secondary schools and tertiary institutions has been awfully poor and worrisome (Olanipekun 2013). This Adepoju (2002) noted while citing Obemeata when he said that 93% of secondary school leavers in any given year fail to qualify for university education simply because of English language. He reported that 7.7% had credit in English language in 1998, 9.9% in 1999 and 6.3% in 1990. At tertiary institutions and most especially among students in Colleges of Education, students have not equally been faring well in General English. This Iliyas (2013) on students' academic performance in General English among students in Colleges of Education in Kwara State revealed when he averred that the inability of Colleges of Education students to take a meaningful note from lecture has been a reflection of their poor English background which has always led to overall poor results in the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) and post – qualification teaching. This was ascertained in a study he conducted where note-taking was used as a potent instrument for complementing students' attention and retention of information.

It is sad to note that there is nothing to write home about in relation to both students' academic performance and communicative competence in English language. Pathetically, this problem is not only noticed among undergraduate students alone but has also been noticed even among the postgraduate students. The ordinary level examination is no longer a good measure of language proficiencies of the students admitted into tertiary institutions. To this effect, a critical minded person could contend that the students who enter the tertiary institutions are ill equipped to use and to understand English adequately, as they read texts laboriously and are unable to use simple English structures correctly; they are quite plagued to manipulate language with boldness and competence. Hence, the introduction of General English in the curriculum of tertiary institutions becomes more than necessary.

In view of this, General English no doubt, is integrate in the curriculum of tertiary institutions in order to arrest the falling standard of students' academic performance for the cogent fact that documentations in students' field are in English in this part of the world. But, one question that readily comes to mind is to what extent the designed curriculum for General English in tertiary institutions have been able to address and meet the present challenges of communicative competence among students today in Nigeria especially in this age of digitalization and globalization where learning take place anytime anywhere.

That aside, this paper will seek to unfold course content-based analysis of students' academic performance in General English II (GSE 121) during the 2012/2013 academic session. Course contents under examination in this research as seen in the curriculum are Grammar, Vocabulary, Sentence types, Study skills and Reading Comprehension. Topics under the aforementioned various course contents are verb-tenses, concord, lexis and structure, auxiliary/model verb, synonym, antonym, homophone, homonym, study skills and reading comprehension.

2. Research Designed and Methodology

This research work employed descriptive survey method where students' scores in General English II (GSE 121) were collected through pro-forma, during the 2012/2013 academic session and were analyzed for the purpose of the study. The sample population comprises of two hundred students from the College of Education (Tech.) Lafiagi in Kwara State.

The researchers with the permission of the Head of the Department, General Studies Education Department in College of Education (Tech.) Lafiagi in Kwara State collected the results of students in General English II (GSE 121) from General Studies Education Department which was based on fifty objective questions. The General English

results under General Studies Education Department have also gone for moderation under various distinctive higher institutions in the country before being released which made the instruments valid and reliable for this research work.

In this paper, we attempted to understand academic performance of students in Kwara State College of Education (Tech.), Lafiagi and English learners' academic performance in grammar, reading texts, study skills, vocabulary, sentence types and most importantly verb-tenses. In addition, the data gathered from this study will be useful to provide teachers with language aspects where students have problems for the purpose of focusing on those aspects in order to enhance students' communicative competence and academic performance in General English.

One major statistical tool found suitable for this research work was Frequency counts and percentage. This is used in order to find out information and to gather understanding of the present situation in relation to students' academic performance in the course contents; the topics within the course contents and as this relates to their communicative competence in General English.

3. Findings and Results

Topical analysis of the course content based on the percentage of those who passed in each course contents.

Table 1. Grammar, Verb-tenses.

Serial Number	Question	% of Correct answer
1	1	3
2	2	10
3	3	21
4	4	16
5	5	8
6	6	7
7	7	8
8	8	3
9	9	11
10	10	5

From Table 1, 10 questions were set from verb-tenses and students did not perform well in any of the questions.

Table 2. Agreement(concord)

Serial Number	Question	% of Correct answer
11	11	16
12	12	10
13	13	70
14	14	12
15	15	31
16	16	20
17	17	21
18	18	47
19	19	10
20	20	70

Table 2 revealed that 10 questions were set based on concord and students performed well only in 3 questions.

Table 3. This table indicates students' performance in lexis/structure and auxiliary/model verb

Lexis and Structure			Auxiliary/Model Verb
Serial Number	Question	% of Correct answer	% of Correct answer
21	21	57	-
22	22	39	-
23	23	26	-
24	24	41	-
25	25	53	-
26	36	-	42
27	37	-	38

Out of 5 questions that were asked from lexis and structure, students did well in 3 questions. Two questions were set from auxiliary/model verb; students did well in 1 question.

Table 4. Vocabulary

Antonyms			Synonym
Serial Number	Question	% of correct answer	% of correct answer
28	26	15	-
29	27	27	-
30	28	26	-
31	29	11	-
32	30	28	-
33	31	-	21
34	32	-	18
35	33	-	17
36	34	-	30
37	35	-	14

Table 5. This table illustrates students' academic performance based on homophones and homonym

Homophones			Homonym
Serial Number	Question	% of correct answer	% of correct answer
38	41	15	-
39	42	14	-
40	42	-	10
41	44	-	10

Table 5, and 6 were premised on 14 questions set from vocabulary and Students did not perform well in any of the questions.

Table 6. Sentence Types

Serial number	Topics	Question	% of correct answer
42	Compound complex	38	31
43	Simple sentence	39	29
44	Compound sentence	40	27

Table 7 unfolded that, out of the 3 questions that were set from sentence types' questions, students did not perform well in any of 3 questions.

Table 7. Study Skills

Serial Number	Question	% of correct answer
45	45	40
46	46	49

The above Table on study skills indicated that students performed well in the two questions that were set.

Table 8. Reading Comprehension

Serial Number	Question	% of correct answer
47	47	27
48	48	33
49	49	24
50	50	66

The last Table is on comprehension. Out of 5 questions that were set, students did well in only one question.

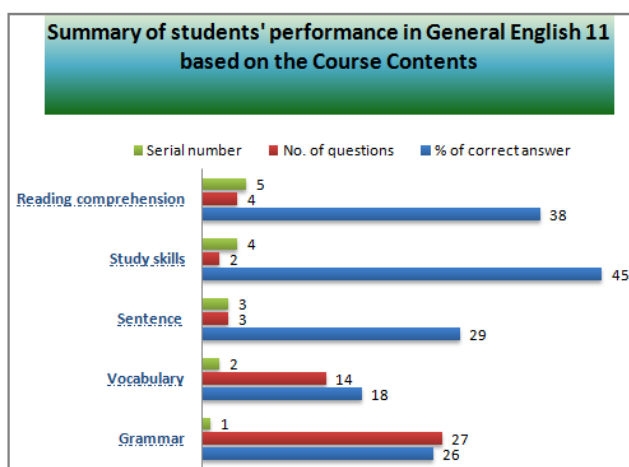


Fig 9. This is a concise table of course content analysis of students' academic performance in General English 11

4. Discussion of Findings and Results

Olanipekun (2013)&Ayodele (1998) separately acclaimed that students' academic performance in English language at the Senior School Certificate Examination has been persistently poor in the past 20 years. Iliyas (2013) also on students' academic performance in General English among students in College of Education(Tech.),Lafiagi in Kwara State revealed that the students have poor background in English language due to their inability to take a meaningful note from lectures, a fact that reflect their poor academic performance in English language.

In the light of the aforesaid therefore, analysis from table 1 and 2 above has shown that students are not performing well at all in grammar in relation to topics like verb-tenses and concord since students could not score above 40% in many of those questions that were set. Also, from table 3, out of five questions, students did well in two questions alone under lexis and structure and under auxiliary verb; they failed one of the question and passed just one alone out of two questions. One could infer from the vocabulary tables in table 4, and 5 above that students are also poor in vocabulary. Also from table 6 and 8 it is obvious that students cannot differentiate between the sentence types in English language and they performed poorly in reading comprehension.

Analysis of students' academic performance in the course contents under different topics as seen in the tables above resonated that apart from study skills where students' performance is better with reference to table 7 and fig. 9;their performance in other topics are not encouraging. To this effect, verb-tenses, reading comprehension, sentence types, synonym, antonym, homophone and homonyms need to be given more appropriate attention by the teachers. This is because learners should be well equipped in all language aspects and be aware of their purpose in use for a better literacy achievement.

Forthwith, the academic performance of students both at secondary school and post-secondary school is worrisome

in English language and in General English, respectively. This is revealed in the summary analysis of students' academic performance in fig. 9 where students' academic performance is shameful in grammar, vocabulary, sentence types and in reading comprehension. It is evident from the ongoing that performance in English is in crisis in Nigeria and this may also be connected to poor reading habit and poor understanding of English verb which is one of the important topics in Part of speech in English Language.

No wonder, Aina *et al.* (2013) averred while citing Ojo that poor reading ability in a student is a major catalyst towards the general poor performance of students in schools as they relate this controversial debate on falling standard of education to be centered on English language. More importantly, to them, reading science and technical education in a foreign language is a real challenge for learners who are in constant struggle with comprehension shortcomings and understanding of tenses in English.

In view of the aforesaid, teaching of English grammar should be one of the corner-stones of General English class. Topics like verb tenses, concord, lexis and structure should be given more attention by the teachers. The teachers should also ensure that other aspects of the curriculum, such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, sentence type and study skills are further given more attention by the teachers. If English teachers want the learners to have better literacy achievement, they must be ready to equip the learners in all language aspects very well.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is very evident from the ongoing discussion that performance in General English is in a big mess in the country today and this may also be connected to poor reading habit, poor understanding of verb structures and so on. No wonder students' academic performance in General English is abysmally low. It is therefore plausible to aver that College students are not faring well in English with shadow understanding of basic topics such as verb-tenses, vocabulary, lexis and structure, sentence types and so on which has resulted in low proficiency and shattered communicative competence in English language which further resulted in under-achievement among Nigeria senior secondary school students and those at the higher institutions.

Finally, based on the findings of this research work and for students' communicative competence and language proficiency to be enhanced among students in College of Education (Tech.), Lafiagi, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. The emphasis on language teaching in any English class should be based on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures. This should further embrace an integration of grammatical and functional teaching

gear toward developing the students' communicative competence.

2. English second language learners should be trained on the communicative acts in English so as to create an environment that eases learning and usage of English and to allow natural language skills' learning to take place.
3. Topics in English such as verb-tenses, vocabulary, sentence types and reading comprehension must be taught by teachers with all seriousness with various teaching methods in order to ensure that the students really understand those topics by heart.
4. Learners cannot learn or acquire all the vocabularies, the grammars to communicate, different sentence formations and all the needed study skills within the confine of the classroom. Thus, learners can also learn through mass media by reading article, newspapers, literary texts and listening to news but the media should also watch what they publish for the sake of these young minds.

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