CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS BETWEEN PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN SCIENCE SUBJECTS AMONG STUDENTS IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, YOLA

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ABSTRACT: This study carried out an correlational analysis between proficiency in English and students performance in science subjects among FCE Yola students. The study was based on survey research design. The study area was Federal College of Education, Yola. The study sampled 160 NCE II science students in 2018/2019 academic season. Thus, the students were sampled at rate of 40 students from Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology and Physics department respectively. The study was based on performance of students in their core course subjects, and their proficiency in English language for 2018/2019 academic season. The data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 significant level. The study found a strong relationship between English language proficiency of students and their academic performance in mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics respectively. The study concluded that the initial assumption that science students require little English language is not hold. Therefore, the study recommended for making English language a requirement for admission in science courses as well as introduction of special purpose English for science students.
Keywords: Proficiency in English, Students' Performance, Science Subjects,

INTRODUCTION

English language is a tool through which people across the globe engage in effective and active communication with one another. The multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of Nigerian polity on the one hand and the absence of a national unifying indigenous language on the other, have led to the adoption of English language as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication (Fakeye, 2012). The language is the medium of instruction for all school subjects from the primary school level to the university level. It is also a compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels

of education in Nigeria. Adeosun (2014) expressed that the poor performance of students in English language in both internal and external exams, has been a great concern for educators in various disciplines, since English language remains the only medium of instruction for other subjects in Nigeria. English language remains the pivot on which the educational wheel of Nigeria rotates because it plays major role in the understanding of other subjects either art, social or science. This suggests that mastery of English language is very important for every student not only to pass the English language as a subject but to perform well in other school subjects.

As a result of dominance of English language as medium of instruction for other subjects in Nigeria schools, the students' proficiency in English language could be visualized to be one important contributor to the unexplained variance of the differences in academic achievement. Physics, Chemistry and Biology are considered as important to every science students at senior secondary school level and at tertiary institution such as colleges of education the subject are considered as key science subjects including, integrated science and computer science. The respective curriculum for science subjects were designed to offer literacy for the functional living in the society; to acquire basic concepts and principles of science as a preparation for further studies; to acquire essential scientific skills and attitude as a preparation for the technological application of each science subject and to stimulate and enhance creativity (Yunusa, 2015). The experiences are meant to lead to an all-round mental, social and moral development of the leaner. Its emphasis is not only the understanding of the fundamental scientific concept and principles, but also the experimental approach of investigation. However, both at the theoretical class and practical classes, English language remains the communication mode for teachers and students. Also, the textbooks, manuals and laboratory guides are all written in English language for the students' understanding. This poses an initial comprehension challenge for those students with poor mastery of English language. According to Ahman-Mahmud (2016), there is a correlation between language learning and

students' ability to comprehend scientific concepts. Likewise, Freeman (2008) expressed that oral communication in science subject many valuable effects on the students' learning and thinking processes. In most aspects of teaching and learning of science subjects in Nigerian schools, English language remains a means to offer support to the students, build understanding and ensure that learning is meaningful and relevant. The science teachers usually try to clearly convey the ideas about particular aspects of their subject, through uses of various figures of speech such as metaphors or similes. However, the poor mastery of English language by students may make such teachers' effort misunderstood by students and thereby distance them from understanding the concepts, which the teachers are trying to explain.

Abubakar (2015) laments the poor performance of students in English Language at SSCE level and argues that such matter is serious because of the influence which English has on all other school subjects. This tends to point to the notion that student's success or failure in English language could influence their performance in other disciplines such as physics., chemistry and biology Jadie, Sonya, Laura and Natasha (2012) assert that low proficiency in English language has been considered a barrier to learning and academic success at different education level. This is because English learners often lack the language proficiency necessary to understand the text content and academic work. Iliyas (2014) assert that a lack of adequate mastery of English language (language of instruction) is a major problem relating to inadequate understanding of the teacher's speech (listening problem) that results from poor vocabulary and syntactic knowledge (note taking problem), deficient language background and compromise in qualifying entry examination to current stratum of the school's ladder among students as source of understanding constraint. Iliyas (2014) traced the poor language of instruction challenge to attitudinal problem among students and between students and teachers of other disciplines. The author noted that many students regard proficient knowledge of English language as

only subordinate to the mastery of their main course of study. The author further stressed on the instances of teachers of other subjects discouraging and underrating the usefulness of English teachers attendance and competence in English as not very important for students' success. Vehemently, English language proficiency could go a long way in affecting students' academic performance in a science subject such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology, for English language is the gateway to educational advancement through which the curriculum, instruction materials, practical manuals, textbooks as well as evaluation of Nigerian students is based on. Students that misinterpret instruction during examination are likely to perform poorly. The same goes to interpreting and understanding of exams' questions, which are strictly written in English language.

Science subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology and others are among the important subjects for science students in various level of education. However, majority of those students who offer these subjects consider the concepts involved as too abstract to understand and the contents taught too difficult to learn (Opasina, 2012). Also, many students have opted out of science class to either art or commercial classes due to the fear of coping with technicalities of the course, which they perceived very difficult. Thus, fear of understanding the concepts and principles of core science subjects is among the factors responsible for reduction in the numbers of students who enroll for subjects such as physics, chemistry and biology at tertiary institution (SMASSE, 2001). Earlier approaches to solve the problems of students dislike as well as poor academic performance in science could be argued propelled different empirical researches that focused on many other factors such as; teachers variables, school climate, school facilities, parental support, home background factors, curriculum implementation, school leadership and students factors among others (Ahman-Mahmud, 2016). However, very little research attention has been paid to the aspect of English language proficiency on students' academic achievement especially in core science subjects like physics, chemistry and biology.

However, pass in English language is among the general requirements for any students to offer science and engineering courses in tertiary institutions. This buttressed the general believe that science and engineering students do not really need English language as much like other courses. This believe prompt the current study to determine whether any relationship occurs between students proficiency in English language and other science subjects like physics, chemistry and biology at tertiary institution.

Objectives of the study

i)   To determine the relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic achievement in physics

ii) To establish relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic achievement in biology

iii) To establish relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic achievement in chemistry

iv) To establish relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic achievement in mathematics

Research Hypothesis

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in Physics.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in chemistry.

H_{O3}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in biology.

H_{O4}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in mathematics.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on systemic functional linguistics theory by Halliday (1976). The theory expressed that language is organized within cultures based on cultural ideologies. The systemic functional

linguistics refers to the system as a whole, in which linguistic choices are made. Michael Halliday believed that individuals make linguistic choices based on the ideologies of the systems that those individuals inhabit. For Halliday, there is a "network of meanings" within a culture that constitutes the "social semiotic" of that culture. This "social semiotic" is encoded and maintained by the discourse system of the culture. For systemic functional linguistics theorists, contexts in which texts are produced recur, in what they call "situation types." People raised within a specific culture become accustomed to the "situation types" that occur within that culture, and are more easily able to maneuver through the "situation types" within that culture than people who were not brought up within it (Lavid, Arus & Zamorano-Mansilla, 2010).

Halliday's approach to cultural context in the formation of recurrent "linguistic situation types" influenced other scholars, such as J.R. Martin. Martin (1985) led the SFL pedagogical approach, which emphasized the role of context in text formation. Martin and his associate believed that process-based approaches to education ignored the cultural boundaries of texts, and privileged middle- and upper-class students at the expense of students from lower-class backgrounds. According to Martin and other systemic functional linguistics scholars, an explicit focus on genre in literature would help literacy teaching and promote proficiency in any choice of language. Thus, focusing on genre reveals the contexts that influence texts, and teaches those contexts to students, so that they can create texts and lexis in its true cultural form. Therefore, Martin and his associates in the systemic functional linguistics argue that a child from other linguist background may need to be taught from beginning for easier adaptation. They express further that through genre language work in schools, which supposed to be "staged, goal-oriented, social process" learner is expected to adapt and improve in proficiency even when not brought up with such language.

One of the main branches of systemic functional linguistics is language for specific purposes, generally known as English for specific purposes. According to John Swales Caffarel (2016), English for specific purposes (ESP) has been around since the 1960s, but ESP scholars did not begin using genre as a pedagogical approach until the 1980s, when various institutions became aware of variation in the English requirement of every academic profession. Thus, the observed huge variation in the English language both in academic and research settings, led Swales in 1982 to lay out the methodological approach that brought together ESP and genre analysis. Swales (1982) identified two characteristics of ESP genre analysis namely: its focus on academic research in English and its use of genre analysis for applied ends. ESP focuses on specific genres within spheres of activity, such as the medical profession, engineering, legal and laws among others but focuses on the broader concept of communicative purposes within respective fields of study.

Above all, systemic functional linguistics theorists argue that the child needs not to be born within a community speaking a language before acquiring proficiency in particular language. This suggests that language proficiency is attainable through training and this proves that every student is likely to attain English language proficiency if all other learning factors are provided as required. Therefore, the English language proficiency that aimed to enhance performances in the physics has to be tailored in line with physics terminologies and registered words that will make the students be more familiar with core concept in Physics while they undergo English language lesson.

Concept of English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency is the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts (Olanipekun, 2013). According to Jadie et al. (2012), language proficiency is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in a language. As theories among pedagogues as to what constitutes proficiency go, there is little consistency as to how

different organizations classify it. Additionally, fluency and language competence are generally recognized as being related, but separate controversial subjects. In predominant frameworks in the United States, proficient speakers demonstrate both accuracy and fluency, and use a variety of discourse strategies (Castro, Páez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2013). Thus, native speakers of a language can be fluent without being considered proficient. Native-level fluency is estimated to be between 20,000 and 40,000 words, but basic conversational fluency might only require as little as 3,000 words (Castro et al., 2013). Language proficiency is one of a variety of terms used to characterize or measure a person's language ability and it is often used in conjunction with accuracy and complexity (Iliyas, 2014).

Types of Proficiency

There are four commonly discussed types of proficiency: reading proficiency, oral proficiency, oral-reading proficiency, and written or compositional proficiency. These types of proficiency are interrelated, but do not necessarily develop in tandem or linearly. One may develop show proficiency in certain type(s) and be less fluent or non-fluent in others (Caffarel, 2016).

a) **Reading Proficiency:** This refers to the link between the recognition of words while reading and reading comprehension, which manifests itself in the speed and accuracy that one is able to read text. Research on reading fluency aligns concepts of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. To achieve reading proficiency, readers must have knowledge of the content of the language as well as the vocabulary being used. Interventions designed to help children learn to read fluently generally include some form of repeated reading, but this process may differ for children with learning disabilities, who may struggle with reading fluency (Lavid et al., 2010). Bandeira-deMello, Blankenship and McLaughlin (2010) argued that reading proficiency requires three sets of interrelated skills that develop over time: language and communication, mechanics of reading, and content knowledge. Reading proficiency requires that students be able to identify the words on

the page accurately and fluently; that they have enough knowledge and thinking ability to understand the words, sentences, and paragraphs; and that they be motivated and engaged enough to use their knowledge and thinking ability to understand and learn from the text.

b) **Speaking Proficiency:** This is expressed as a measurement both of production and reception of speech, as a fluent speaker must be able to understand and respond to others in conversation. Spoken language is typically characterized by seemingly non-fluent qualities such as fragmentation, pauses, false starts, hesitation and repetition, because of 'task stress.' How orally fluent one is can therefore be understood in terms of perception, and whether these qualities of speech can be perceived as expected and natural or unusual and problematic (Itsuokor, 2010). According to Jadie et al. (2012) speaking is making use of words in an ordinary voice, uttering words, knowing and being able to use language, expressing oneself in words, making speech. Speaking proficiency can be expressed as ability to voice out or uttering words appropriately. Lavid et al. (2010) expressed the opinion that speaking proficiency can be inferred ability to make use of words or a language to express oneself in an ordinary voice. Speaking proficiency is the ability to perform the linguistics knowledge in actual communication, including how to express someone ideas, feeling, thoughts, and need orally (Ulibarri, Maria, Spencer & Rivas, 2014).

c) **Oral Reading Proficiency:** This is sometimes distinguished from oral fluency. Oral reading proficiency refers to the ability to read words accurately and quickly while using good vocal expression and phrasing (Lavid et al., 2010). Oral reading proficiency is often linked to Schreiber's Theory of Prosody, which places importance on the tone, rhythm, and expressiveness of speech. Effort to attain oral reading proficiency requires a cognitive effort that is associated with decoding the words on the page. Oral reading proficiency is one of several critical components required for successful reading comprehension. Students who read with

automaticity and have appropriate speed, accuracy, and proper expression are more likely to comprehend material because they are able to focus on the meaning of the text. A student's level of verbal reading proficiency has a 30-year evidence base as one of the most common, reliable, and efficient indicators of student reading comprehension (Reschly, Busch, Betts, Deno, & Long, 2009). When used as a predictor of higher stakes reading comprehension tasks, an assessment of oral reading proficiency performs as well as or better than many other comprehensive tests of reading. Wayman, Wallace, Wiley, Tichá, and Espin (2011) noted that the fact that oral reading proficiency tasks are designed to be brief, reliable, and repeatable, they serve well as tools for universal screening for early intervention for child education.

d) **Written or Compositional Proficiency:** Generally, writing is a core humanistic competency that indicates students' ability to explain, persuade, or convey an experience to an audience. Writing is an important skill for all students to develop. Written proficiency of an individual can be measured in a variety of ways. Researchers have measured by length of the composition (especially under timed conditions), words produced per minute, sentence length, or words per clause. Ratio measures (e.g., words per clause, words per sentence, and words per error-free sentence) have historically been most valid and reliable (Lavid et al., 2010). According to the recent study by Robelle and Ronald (2016) average writing proficiency scores in United State of America increased modestly between 1998 and 2002 for fourth- and eighth-graders (from 150 to 154, and from 150 to 153, respectively). However, in 2002 to 2007 there were no significant changes in twelfth-graders' writing proficiency scores and 2007 to 2013 the US-educational development department reported unimproved writing proficiency of 148 – 153). Though, the stunted in the writing proficiency among students in USA was attributed to the introduction of computer application and courseware which reduced students writing habits during class lesson and examination. Robelle and

Ronald (2016) argued that the introduction of a new computerized writing test application which can be administered to students implies that students will only write little items which may not be enough to measure their writing proficiency.

However, this study will consider written or compositional proficiency, based on the fact that the students' understanding of science concepts are mostly expressed in writing form either during internal or external examination. The use of written proficiency to test students' English language proficiency is also in line with methodology of earlier studies such as Tella (2010), Adegboye (2013) and Caffarel (2016) who used written proficiency to determine proficiency level of students in English language as language of instruction for Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology respectively.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Federal College of Education, Yola. The study sampled 160 NCE II science students in 2018/2019 academic season. Thus, the students were sampled at rate of 40 students from Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology and Physics department respectively. The study was based on performance of students in their core course subjects, and their proficiency in English language for 2018/2019 academic season. The data collected were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 significant level.

RESULTS

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in Physics.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between English Language Proficiency of Student and Academic Achievement in Physics

Stat		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R		.758	.019	12.701	.000[c]
Eta	Proficiency in English	.581			
	Academic performance	.521			
N		40			

The result on table 1 presents the correlation analysis of relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in physics. The result show a correlation value of 0.758, p-value of 0.000. Since calculated p-value (0.000) less than hypothetical p-value (0.05), the null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in Physics is rejected. This implies significant relationship between the proficiency in English by students and their academic achievement in physics. More so, eta 0.581 for proficiency in English, suggested the prediction power of about 58.1% of proficiency in English on the performance of students physics.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in chemistry.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between English Language Proficiency of Student and Academic Achievement in Chemistry

Stat		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R		.612	.013	11.504	.000[c]
Eta	Proficiency in English	.510			
	Academic performance	.501			
N		40			

Table 2 presents the result of correlation analysis of relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in chemistry. The result shows a correlation value of 0.612, p-value of 0.000. Thus, the calculated p-value (0.000) is less

than hypothetical p-value (0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and this implies that there is a significant relationship between the proficiency in English by students and their academic achievement in chemistry. More so, eta 0.510 for proficiency in English, suggested that proficiency in English can predicts about 51.0% of students performance in chemistry.

H_{O3}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in biology.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between English Language Proficiency of Student and Academic Achievement in Biology

Stat		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R		.678	.020	11.574	.000[c]
Eta	Proficiency in English	.509			
	Academic performance	.500			
N		40			

The result on table 3 presents the correlation analysis of relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in biology. The result shows a correlation value of 0.758, p-value of 0.000. Since calculated p-value (0.000) less than hypothetical p-value (0.05), the null hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in biology is rejected. This implies significant relationship between the proficiency in English by students and their academic achievement in biology. More so, eta 0.509 for proficiency in English, suggested the prediction power of about 50.9% of proficiency in English on the performance of students biology.

H_{O4}: There is no significant relationship between the English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in mathematics.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between English Language Proficiency of Student and Academic Achievement in Mathematics

Stat		Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R		.889	.022	11.240	.000[c]
Eta	Proficiency in English	.661			
	Academic performance	.612			
N		40			

Table 2 presents the result of correlation analysis of relationship between English language proficiency rate of students and their achievement in chemistry. The result shows a correlation value of 0.889, p-value of 0.000. Thus, the calculated p-value (0.000) is less than hypothetical p-value (0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and this implies that there is a significant relationship between the proficiency in English by students and their academic achievement in chemistry. More so, eta 0.661 for proficiency in English, suggested that proficiency in English can predicts about 66.1% of students performance in mathematics.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study showed that students' proficiency in English language significantly related with performance in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. This finding shows consistency with the earlier finding by Aina, Ogundele and Olanipekun (2013), Ajibade (2012) and Akomolafe and Olorunfemi-Olabisi (2014) which established strong relationship between students' proficiency in English language and their respective performance in mathematics and physics. Also, earlier studies by Baker, Smolkowski, and Beck (2015), and Caffarel (2016) showed students' performance in biology and chemistry depend largely on English reading proficiency. Though, the findings from current study differed from that by Robelle and Ronald (2016) and Ulibarri et al. (2014) which indicated insignificant relationship between students' performance in chemistry and English. Also, study by Baker et al. (2015) established that strong relationship occurred between physics and mathematics, while English related

weakly with both mathematics and physics. Above, all the current study has reiterated that students' proficiency in English language can predict their performance in mathematics, chemistry, physics and biology. This may not be unconnected with the fact that most science questions that based on comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation depend on grammatical construct which students most understand well before attempt. Also, the fact that English language remains the language of instruction for any subjects include science subject in tertiary education implies that what students likely to get depend also on their proficiency capability. Though, Ajibade (2012) and Aina et al. (2013) argued that proficiency in English does not implies automatics understanding of other subjects, students still need to do their homework. Meanwhile, all research unanimously agreed that having good English proficiency is an added advantage for any students irrespective of course of study.

CONCLUSION

The current study has established a strong link between English proficiency of students and their performance in science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Physics. This study has reiterated that students need English to cope with science subjects either in the classroom (lecture room) or in examination, since English language remains the language of instruction in the classroom and questions statement in examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The college management should ensure that the entrée requirement for those students enrolling for science course include in English language
2. There should be dedicated effort by College management to ensure that science students offer more courses in English Department, especially, the aspect of English for specific purposes (ESP), to enhance their performance in their respective course of study.

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