Academic Achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language Examination, Use of English and Undergraduate Students' Performance in Programmes of Study in Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study was on academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination, Use of English, and undergraduate students' performance in programmes of study. 964 students were sampled from Cross River University of Technology. The data collected for the study were the students' results in WAEC/NECO English Language examination, scores obtained by the students in the Use of English course, and the cumulative grade of students in the programme of study. The hypotheses tested revealed, among others, that there is significant positive relationship between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their academic performance in the specific programmes of study. The researcher then concluded, among others, that the relationship that existed between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their performances in specific programmes of study was significantly positive. Among the recommendations was that English Language teachers should endeavour to efficiently and effectively cover the curriculum content as specified by the examining bodies to ensure that students were adequately prepared for external examinations.

INTRODUCTION

In the school system, instruction is designed purposely to bring about the development of various types of abilities in learners. These abilities manifest themselves as improved performance on the part of the learner. While much

learning goes on outside the school, and much results from the effort of the learner, the school is responsible for the provision and organization of planned instruction that is directed toward planned goals (Gagne & Briggs, 1974). The results of such planned instruction consist of increased learner's performance, which indicates that various kinds of abilities have been gained. Gagne and Briggs (1974) identify five domains of such abilities, viz: intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, information, motor skills, and attitudes. These skills are taught and learnt in English Language lessons.

Learning of English involves cognitive skills or strategies. Cognitive strategy is attributed to Brunner (Gagne & Briggs, 1974). These are capabilities that govern the individual's own learning, remembering and thinking behaviour. They control the learner's behaviour when he is in the process of reading with the intent to learn and the way he gets to the heart of the problem. English is a binding force among the multifarious ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria. Elugbe (1990) puts the number of languages in Nigeria as ranging from 394-400, Omojuwa (1999) about 400 identified languages, Bamgbose (1978) and Eka (2004) put the number at 513.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) stresses the importance of teaching learners properly to enable them acquire competent skills that would aid them to function well in the society. According to Anih (1997), it is in line with this that new teaching and learning approach has been adopted where there is a shift of emphasis from the teacher-centred approach (pedagogy) to the student-centred approach andragogy which offers learners the ample opportunity to effectively manage, conceptualize and reinforce their own learning and transfer their training to practical situations.

The West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiner's Report in English Language (2001) points out that most candidates are ignorant of the rudiments of English Language and thus lose all the marks allocated to spellings, punctuation, grammar, and sequences of tenses. Since English is learnt, not only for interaction in society but for earning a living, it is then apt to add that English learnt could be improved upon as the learner progresses in academics, especially, at the tertiary level of education. According to WAEC (2006), the English language examination is intended, among others, to test candidates' ability to use English correctly, organize material in paragraphs, control sentence structures accurately, exhibit variety in the choice of sentence patterns, comply adequately with the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation. The purpose of the examination is also to test candidates' ability to comprehend written and spoken English, recognize implied meanings in contexts, and to isolate and summarize information. A good knowledge of this will help in further education. It therefore means that deficiency on the part of students in understanding or grasping the very basics in English will preclude them from doing well in their programmes of study in the University.

The objectives of Use of English and communication skills course in the University are to upgrade the general level of English Language ability in handling oral and written communication for the students' general and

academic endeavours, develop special skills in oral and written communication required to meet the specific needs of various subject areas since they are basic to success in academics, equip students with skills for successful academic experience etc. It emphasizes correct grammar and appropriate usage through adequate exposure to various settings, as well as develops an effective and efficient study plan in student's programmes of study.

This study is therefore to find out if the level of competence and achievement in English Language use by students as measured in the WAEC/NECO English examinations, and the students' performance in the Use of English and Communication Skills course in the University facilitate success of students in their various programmes of study in the University.

Statement of hypothesis

1.   There is no significant relationship between students' academic achievement in the WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their academic performances in their programmes of study.
2.   There is no significant relationship between students' academic achievement in the WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their academic performances in the use of English and communication skills course in the University.
3.   There is no significant relationship between students' academic achievement in the use of English and communication skills course, and students' performances in their specific programmes of study.

Literature review

Ameh and Kaita (2002) studied the correlation between students' level performance in WASCE and their courses of study in the tertiary institution. The study involved six hundred (600) students in their third year in the University. The findings revealed a positive correlation between students' performance level in the WASCE and their performance in courses in the University. A research was carried by Laburi (2002) on the relationship between performance of students in WAEC English Language examination and in their programmes of study. Seven hundred and fifty (750) respondents were used for the research. The result showed a significant relationship between performances of students in the WAEC English Language examination and in their programmes of study. However, an earlier study by Motudah (1998) in a similar area had shown very weak relationship. The difference may be attributed to differences in subjects studied and the prevailing examination conditions that each group was subjected to.

Akin (2007) conducted a study to find out if any significant relationship exists between the school certificate grade in English Language and the Federal University of Technology, Akure, (FUTA) grade in General Studies (GNS) 104 Course (Information Retrieval) using two hundred and thirty

eight students. The data for the study consisted of the students' grades in the School Certificate English examination and the FUTA grades in GNS 104. The result showed that there is significant relationship between the School Certificate grades in English Language and FUTA grades in Information Retrieval.

Ibache (2005) researched on performance in NECO as a predictor of performance of students at the tertiary level of education. The researcher used a sample of seven hundred and twenty five respondents selected randomly from four institutions in the South Eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria. One of the findings was that students' performances in academics in their various programmes of study in their tertiary institutions correlated significantly with their achievement in NECO examination. This means that those who had high grades in the NECO examination also did well in their institutions, while those whose performances were not high also performed relative to their NECO examination achievement. Ijanta's (2004) findings also showed that grades obtained in NECO examination in English Language have positive relationship with performance in Use of English course in the University.

Rajabai (1998) studied students' understanding of basic concepts in English as a predictor of their performance in their chosen careers. The researcher used students from twenty selected institutions in the United States of America. The sample size was made up of two hundred and nine African undergraduates. The result of the data analysis showed that the students' performances in their programmes of study in their institutions were high. Jolayemi (1999) investigated the effectiveness of teaching technical English in two technology-based institutions, using a Skills-Oriented Interactive Teaching Method on learners' performance in their areas of study. The researcher used three hundred students in the fourth year from each institution. The findings revealed that students' performances in specific programmes of study were consequent upon their level of understanding of the English language taught to them. The researcher then recommended that English language teachers should sufficiently drill students on registers of the various professions so that the students could apply such knowledge in their programmes of study in their institutions.

Geishina (2006) studied students' achievement in NECO English Language examination to find out if the achievement correlates with that in Use of English and Communication Skills Course in the Polytechnic. With eight hundred and ten (810) students from Polytechnics in the Middle Belt zone of Nigeria the result showed that there was correlation between their achievement in the NECO English Language examination and that in the use of English course.

METHODOLOGY

The research design was the ex post facto design while the research area was Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH),with campuses in Calabar, Obubra, Ogoja and Okuku. The population was made up of final year students of the University.The sample for the study consisted of nine hundred and sixty-four (964) students selected randomly from the departments.

Instrumentation

The data used were the scores (derived from the grades) obtained by each of the students in the WAEC/NECO examination in English Language, the scores of each student in the use of English and communication skills course, and the cumulative grade point average of each student in his or her entire programme of study.The data were analyzed hypothesis by hypothesis.

RESULTS

The results are shown in Tables 1-3.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and academic performance in specific programmes (N=964).

Variable	$x^2 (\ y^2)$	xy	r	Sig Level
WAEC/NECO exam	473435.722	25768.952	.127*	.000
Performance in programme of study	86415.372			

* $P<.05$; df = 962; critical r =.062

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation of students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and use of English and communication skills course (N=964).

Variables	$x^2(\ y^2)$	xy	r	Sig Level
WAEC/NECO examination.	473435.722	18294.560	.076*	.019
Use of Eng and comm. Skills	123472.800			

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* P<.05; df = 962; critical r =.062

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of students' academic achievement in use of English and communication skills course and academic performance in programmes of study (N=964).

Variables	$x^2(\ y^2)$	xy	r	Sig Level
Use of English and communication skills	123472.800	12851.954	.124*	.000
Performance in programmes of study	86415.372			

*P<.05; df = 962   Critical r =.062

DISCUSSION

The result shown in Table 1 indicates that there is a positive relationship between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their performance in specific programmes of study. This finding supports the study by Ameh and Kaita (2002) who recorded results depicting that there is a positive correlation between students' performance level in the WASCE and their performance in their programmes of study in the University. Equally, the finding of the work by Laburi (2002) agrees with the finding of this study. Laburi (2002) in a study on the relationship between performance of students in WAEC English Language examination and in the programmes of study showed a significant relationship. On the other hand, the result of this research does not tally with that of Motudah (1998) who worked on the relationship between performance in WAEC English Language and Use of English Course. Motudah's (1998) work showed a very weak relationship. The difference in the result of this study and that of Motudah (1998) could be accounted for from the point of differences in the psychological disposition of the respondents used, the prevailing examination and environmental conditions, and other possible factors.

The result of this study finds support in Akin (2007) whose report from a study on the relationship between students' performance in School Certificate English Language and Information Retrieval Course showed that there is significant relationship between the School Certificate grades in the English language and Information Retrieval Course. This means that good performance in the school certificate English language examination is significantly related to good performance in the Information retrieval Course, and poor performance in the school Certificate English Language examination is related to poor performance in the Information Retrieval Course. The finding also confirms that of Ibache (2005).

The analysed data in Table 2 show that there is a positive relationship between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO examination in English Language and their performance in Use of English and communication skills course in the University. This is because the result of the data analysis indicates that the significant level of the calculated r –value is .019, less than .05 significant level. Ijanta's (2004) study is affirmed by the finding of this work. The study by Ijanta (1999) had revealed that grades obtained in the Use of English and communication skills course examination relate to the grades obtained in the NECO English Language examination. The data in Table 3 show that there is a positive relationship between students' academic achievement in the Use of English and communication skills and their academic performance in programmes of study. This finding supports that of Jolayemi (1999) whose research finding proved that the performance of students in specific programmes of study was consequent upon their understanding of the English Language learnt. This means that when students are appropriately drilled in English with the registers of the various professions brought to their understanding, it will have a beneficial effect on them in their overall studies. The finding of this also supports that of Geishina (2006).

CONCLUSION

The significantly positive relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their performance in specific programmes of study implies that students who do well in WAEC/NECO English Language examination also do well in their programmes of study. The reverse is also the case since all academic programmes are carried out through English Language. Students whose academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language is high also perform well in the use of English and communication skills course in the University because Use of English course is intended to upgrade students' English Language ability so as to enable them to handle oral and written communication for their general and academic endeavours. Significant positive relationship exists between performance of students in the Use of English and communication skills, and their performance in their specific programmes of study because the Use of English and communication skills course enables the students to develop special skills in English Language use required to meet the specific needs of various subject areas. Knowledge gained in studying English Language at the secondary school level contributes to students' performance in their programmes of study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain significant positive relationship between students' academic achievement in WAEC/NECO English Language examination and their performance in specific programmes of study, English Language teachers should endeavour to cover the curriculum contents as specified by the examining bodies. This will ensure that students are competently prepared for the external examinations. The course specification for the use English and communication skills course should be an offshoot from the WAEC/NECO English language syllabus. This will ensure a gradual and smooth transition from the WAEC/NECO English Language course specification to the use of English and communication skills course. Students should be studious in their academic work so that whatever achievements they are able to make in the Use of English and communication skills course and in their specific programmes of study will be a true reflection of their academic competence or ability.

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