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### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AS A PREDICTOR OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION AMONG STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA.**

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#### **Abstract**

The English language is an essential element of the educational landscape of Nigeria. It describes the instrument of effective teaching and learning at every academic level. Consequently, communication in the classroom has been fraught with challenges due to numerous reasons. Thus, the purpose of this present study was to examine English proficiency as a scarcely explored variable that could determine the variation in classroom communication in tertiary institutions. A convenience sample of two hundred and thirty undergraduates (n=230) was randomly selected from Enugu and Anambra states as the respondents. Data for the study was collected using a self-report instrument assessing English proficiency and classroom communication. A linear regression model was performed on the data, and the result revealed that English proficiency is a significant predictor of classroom communication. Thus, it is concluded that English proficiency is an essential determinant of student-teacher classroom interaction. The practical implications are discussed.

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#### **Introduction:-**

English is an essential component of everyday activity and an official language across Nigerian societies (Akanni et al., 2020; Aririguzoh, 2007; Boyinbode, 2018; Dahunsi, 2017; Osoba & Alebiosu, 2016; Salawu, 2010). It plays a fundamental role in the sustenance of national values and integration of the Nigerian nation (Obiegbu, 2015). It represents a significant aspect of teaching and learning in the educational system and beyond. The English language is a ubiquitous part of education that equips learners with the necessary lifelong knowledge, problem-solving, creative thinking, and innovation, including societal adaptation (Obateru, 2020). The mastery of the English language assures increased confidence for the individual learner (Famogbiyele, 2013). Also, English reflects the spindle on which the educational wheel of Nigeria rotates. English language functions as a driver of interaction and an instrument of scholarly communication in schools (Abubakar, 2018; Prokhorova et al., 2019). English describes the standard of instruction for all subjects from early learning to higher education, and perhaps, it is also a compulsory subject and a measure for assessing students' performance. Thus, English remains an essential subject for learners in Nigerian (Mercy, 2019), a pathway to social interaction in every domain of our socio-world. However, the English language in the classroom is challenged with several variables, including its communication model.

Classroom communication is an interactive language and response between the student and teacher and within students. Communication is a means by which teachers' and learners' varying needs, feelings, and attitudes are conveyed to each other to establish cooperation and achieve learning outcomes. Thus, communication is central and

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indispensable in classroom teaching and learning (Fashiku, 2017; Ismail & Idris, 2009). An important determinant of effective learning is the quality of classroom communication. Hence, instructors' competence is primarily assessed through their communication with the students (Brown, 2005). However, feedback from the students through proper communication is essential in indicating gaps in learning and possible elucidations. Accordingly, classroom communication describes student-teacher interaction in a learning situation. Perhaps, a collapse in classroom communication implies that the objectives of education cannot be attained. Indeed, teachers are experiencing difficulty achieving effective classroom communication (Cegarra & María, 2020).

Furthermore, achieving effective classroom communication reflects primary challenge to teachers at the undergraduate level in contemporary society (Subha & Nagarani, 2009). More so, it reflects a veritable tool and foundation for the teachers' crucial and significant roles to be assessed. It enhances broad and expressive interaction between the instructors and learners. For example, studies have found a high and positive relationship between teachers' communication proficiency in the classroom and students' motivation in knowledge (Akudo, 2020). It is also crucial for presenting a class or lecture in class (Das, 2014). However, proficient communication has an essential function in teaching because failure in communication will result in an unsuccessful process (Mahmud, 2017). Possibly, problems and losses associated with classroom performance could be attributed to ineffective communication in the classroom. Positive teaching and learning can only occur when there is effective communication in the school (Chung et al., 2016; Duta et al., 2015; Trihastuti & Zamzani, 2018). More so, successful communication happens when the message is understood correctly by the receiver and the feedback given to the sender is acceptable

English Proficiency is conceptualized as the ability to effectively use English to communicate meaning in verbal and written contexts while observing the relevant principles of grammar. English proficiency is an essential determinant of accomplishment in academics. Research suggests that teachers' general proficiency meaningfully affects their language utilization in the classroom to enhance learning (van Canh & Renandya, 2017). In particular, proficiency in English is used to measure students' competency in Nigerian schools (Ghani et al., 2012). Thus, students are expected to read, write, listen and speak effectively for proper teaching and learning.

Literature abounds that suggested an association between proficiency in English and increased performance in the Nigerian context (Dogo, 2016; Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009; Jimoh & Kenneth, 2016; Oyinloye et al., 2020; Taiwo, 2018; Ozowuba, 2018). For example, Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) examined English language proficiency as a predictor of academic achievement using a sample of students in Nigeria. Their result indicated that proficiency in English positively relates to students' overall academic achievement. Similarly, the finding corroborates numerous revelations across the universe (e.g., Maleki & Zangani, 2007; Feast, 2002; Bayliss & Raymond, 2004). Thus, the findings are an indication that poor proficiency in the English language correlates with poor academic performance. Indeed, there are indications that many students and graduates in Nigeria cannot use standard English in their formal and informal discourse (Ghani et al., 2012).

### **The present study**

Numerous studies have underscored the relevance of instructor-learner classroom communication (Jafari & Asgari, 2020; Rawat, 2016; Tan et al., 2019; Asrar et al., 2018). In this paper, classroom communication entails the ability of the learner to efficiently interact with the teacher and express one's position during the learning process. Thus, communication relating to questions, reporting incomprehension, and demanding clarity are essential parts of classroom learning. A growing insinuation suggests that most learners are withdrawn in the active learning process due to their inability to use English for communication proficiently. Nevertheless, the anxieties relative to uttering blunder, the embarrassment associated with wrong grammar, the psychological process of stage fright, and the influence of the mother tongue mostly restrain many students from communicating in the classroom. However, the trend is prevalent in every learning category in Nigeria. The present paper is concerned with poor classroom communication among undergraduates. Thus, the study's primary purpose is to explore English proficiency as a scarcely explored variable that could account for the variation in classroom communication among students in Tertiary institutions in the South-East, Nigeria.

### **Hypothesis:**

English proficiency would significantly predict classroom communication.

### **Method:-**

### Participants

Students from Tertiary Institutions in the South-east of Nigeria constituted the research population. A total of two hundred and thirty (n=230) students within the age range of 18-30 years comprising male and female enrolled in undergraduate programs were randomly selected from five public tertiary institutions in Enugu and Anambra States of Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design.

### Measures:-

#### English language proficiency

English proficiency was measured with a scale designed to assess one's English-speaking proficiency level. The instrument was adopted from the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT). The standardized TOEFL Paper Test is designed to test the individual's speaking skills. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS), designed to measure English language proficiency in everyday situations. A higher score on this scale specifies a higher proficiency level. The scale was validated following a pilot study .83 Cronbach's alpha was recorded.

#### Classroom communication

Classroom communication was assessed with an instrument designed to measure students 'skills to communicate, ask questions and express satisfaction in the classroom. The scale comprises ten items in a 5-points Linkert-type. The instrument covers questions such as "My English is very poor" "I don't like asking questions in class." A lower score shows high classroom communication skills. Cronbach's alpha .88 was recorded for the instrument following a pilot study in this study.

### Procedure:-

With the aid of trained research assistants, students from three different tertiary institutions were recruited for the study. The respondents were mainly pooled from the student's lodges and classrooms. A total of 265 students were approached and asked to participate in a survey to understand better their English proficiency and how it impacts them in the school. In all, 251 participants out of the 265 approached agreed to participate in the survey. Hence, the questionnaires were given to them. Two hundred and fifty-one (251) copies of the questionnaires administered were completed and recovered on the spot. Nonetheless, only the satisfactorily filled questionnaires (i.e., 230) were used for the study.

### Result:-

A simple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that English language proficiency would significantly predict classroom communication. The investigation revealed that English proficiency statistically significantly predicted the respondent's communication in the classroom  $F(1,228), 37.72, P<.000$ . Thus, the outcome indicates that the assumption that English proficiency would significantly predict classroom communication was affirmed.

**Table 1:-** Table showing the simple regression result for English proficiency and classroom communication.

	B	SEB	$\beta$	t	Sig
Constant	1.85	.031		56.68	.000
English proficiency	-.74	.046	-.76	-16.73	.000
$R^2$	.658				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient;  $\beta$  = Standardized coefficient;  $R^2$  = Coefficient of determination. \* $P<.000$ .

### Discussion:-

The study examined English proficiency as a predictor of classroom communication among tertiary institutions students in southeast Nigeria. Data from a convenience sample of two hundred and thirty undergraduates were analyzed using simple regression analysis. The result demonstrated that English proficiency statistically predicted classroom communication among the respondents. This means that effectively expressing oneself in English

contributes significantly to communicating in the classroom. The finding is consistent with previous studies (Asif et al., 2018; Cabansag, 2020). For instance, Otto (2018) found that English proficiency prevented Pakistan students from speaking in the classrooms. Equally, research has found a link between English proficiency and classroom work styles (Chiang, 2016). The result can be explained based on the conception that erratic English negatively impacts communication. The study's finding indicated that the respondents varied in English proficiency which confirms the perpetual concern by educators over the poor classroom communication by many students despite years of learning it in the formal settings. Silence in the classroom is a common problem, especially among lower-proficiency classes (Razak et al., 2021). Perhaps, the previous study contends that impediments in the learning environment limit students' use of English inside the classroom (Alharbi, 2015).

Furthermore, the finding implicates English proficiency in the observed low student classroom participation among students in Nigeria. Accordingly, Agbatogun (2012) noted that poor vocabulary constrained learners' maximum involvement in the classroom process. Thus, the present study provides insight into the role of poor proficiency in English on effective classroom communication in tertiary institutions within the southeast of Nigeria.

### **Limitations, strengths, and future directions**

It is essential to report the observed limitation relative to the present study. Firstly, the sample size, comprising only students from tertiary institutions in two states, limited the current study's generalization. The data used for the analysis was exclusively based on self-report, which could raise the issue of common method variance. However, the current study contributes to the English literature by revealing English proficiency as an essential variable in classroom communication, therefore, expanding our understanding of the influencing variables in the poor student-teacher classroom interaction among undergraduates in the southeast of Nigeria. Moreover, research attempting to investigate the relationship between English proficiency and classroom communication using Nigerian samples is scarce to the best of our knowledge. Hence, justifying our study. Future studies should consider the use of data from more inclusive sources and endeavor to utilize data triangulation.

### **Practical implication**

To our understanding, the finding has provided evidence supporting the predictive effect of English proficiency in students' willingness to communicate and interact in the classroom. Also, the study helps provide relevant data to the education administrators, relevant stakeholders interested in promoting teachers-students classroom communication, and researchers since the result provided insight into the reason for poor academic outcomes among students in the country's southeast region.

### **Conclusion:-**

The current study is concerned with the predictive role of English proficiency on classroom communication among undergraduates. Indeed, our expectation was confirmed by the simple linear regression conducted on the data. Thus, the study concluded that English proficiency among undergraduates is a crucial determinant of student-teacher classroom interaction. However, it is unclear if other variables contributed to the study's outcome. It is recommended that teachers establish a robust, inclusive classroom that accommodates students with English proficiency concerns. Future research should also expand the representative sample to include the teachers and determine other influencing factors in the relationship between English proficiency and classroom communication.

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