

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AMONG LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT BABCOCK UNIVERSITY: A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

ADEBAWOJO Bolanle Omolayo 

Babcock University High School (BUHS)

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ABSTRACT

English language is a lingua franca and the dominant language for international communication, research, business, and education, English stands out among the many other global languages. Therefore, this study addressed the interplay between assessment approaches, student motivation, and proficiency among undergraduate language students in a private university in Nigeria.

A survey research design was adopted for this study while total enumeration sampling method was used to select the participants of this study. A self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection. Four research questions were raised to guide the study. Analysis of data was done using descriptive statistics and simple regression analysis fixed at the .05 significant levels.

A total of 70 respondents participated in the study. Their age ranged from 20-53 years with a mean age of 36.8 years. The results show that the most common assessment approaches employed in teaching English Language are summative assessment (3.431), formative assessment (3.209), peer assessment (2.987) and self-assessment (2.339). Additionally, the overall motivation level for English proficiency was moderately high; undergraduates are proficient in English language while 34% of the total variance in the undergraduates' English proficiency is accounted for by assessment approaches employed in teaching English language and students' motivation towards English proficiency.

The study concluded that assessment modes and motivation play a significant role in English proficiency among students. Additionally, motivated students are more likely to develop effective learning habits, pursue goals with persistence, and experience a greater sense of well-being.

Keywords: Assessment approaches, motivation, proficiency, language students.

INTRODUCTION

Language is essential to both society advancement and human growth. It is the main channel for intercultural dialogue, communication, and the sharing of knowledge. English language is a lingua franca and the dominant language for international communication, research, business, and education, English stands out among the many other global languages. Gaining proficiency is not only an academic objective for language learners, but also a vital life skill that influences academic, professional, and personal development, particularly in Nigeria, where English is both an official language and a medium of instruction. However, a lot of students struggle to acquire the language, and improving learning results requires a knowledge of the underlying causes of these difficulties.

English proficiency refers to the ability to effectively communicate and understand English in various contexts,

encompassing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Garganera et al, 2024). It is a measure of how well someone can use English in academic, professional, and social settings, and is often assessed through standardized tests. The relevance of English proficiency becomes even more pronounced for language students, who are expected to excel in the subject to not only secure their academic success but also prepare for roles as educators, translators, or communication experts. Yet, evidence suggests that many students struggle to achieve the required levels of proficiency, indicating gaps in the educational processes that need urgent attention.

Language learners' English language skills have consequences that go beyond their own academic achievement. Students who speak the language well are better able to lead, communicate, and teach, all of which can significantly advance the growth of the country (Bin et al., 2023). Low proficiency levels, on the other hand, might

worsen structural issues in Nigeria's education system, restrict students' professional options, and impede personal growth. This is especially troubling in a multilingual society like Nigeria, where English is a vital instrument for international interaction and a unifying language. Graduates of the country must be able to communicate in a language that can help them traverse the complexity of a globalized environment if they are to compete on a global scale.

According to a study by Owolabi and Omoniyi (2022), only a small percentage of language students at Nigerian colleges reach high skill levels. This trend is ascribed to antiquated teaching methods, low motivation, and subpar assessment techniques. Comparable patterns have been noted in other low- and middle-income nations, where systemic inefficiencies, cultural norms, and resource limitations restrict the efficacy of language instruction initiatives. The influence this issue has on employability and national growth makes it more urgent to look into the subject matter.

Proficiency in English is frequently a crucial factor in determining job success, and employers are increasingly looking for graduates with strong communication abilities. Language-challenged students are less likely to land competitive jobs, and their incapacity to communicate clearly can lead to missed chances for creativity and teamwork. Moreover, as Nigeria seeks to position itself as a global player, the inability of its graduates to meet international language standards poses a significant barrier to progress.

Despite the critical role of English proficiency in personal, academic, and professional success, achieving high levels of competency remains a significant challenge for many language students. Traditional assessment approaches, often characterized by standardized testing and rote learning, fail to address the diverse needs of students. These methods focus primarily on theoretical knowledge rather than practical application, leading to a disconnection between what is learned in the classroom and the language skills required in real-world contexts (Brown, 2019). Additionally, a lack of adequate motivation exacerbates the problem. While some students are driven by intrinsic factors, many struggle with low motivation due to monotonous instructional methods and limited opportunities to see the relevance of English in their daily lives. This gap between motivation and educational practices often results in low engagement, poor academic performance, and a lack of confidence in using English effectively (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

The proficiency levels of language students in English have far-reaching implications. Inadequate proficiency undermines their ability to function effectively in multilingual environments, limits their academic success, and restricts their career opportunities. At a systemic level, poor language skills among graduates compromise the quality of education and contribute to the broader issue of skill mismatch in Nigeria's labor market. For the nation, the inability to produce

proficient English speakers hinders international collaboration, economic growth, and national development (Owolabi & Omoniyi, 2022).

Preliminary findings suggest that language learners' levels of English proficiency vary, making this issue especially noticeable among undergraduates. A cursory survey shows that whereas some students do well in the same material, others have trouble with basic communication skills. This discrepancy calls into question how well the existing methods of testing and motivational techniques promote English proficiency. There are severe repercussions if this problem is not resolved. Limited academic and professional prospects may be faced by students with low proficiency levels, which would prolong cycles of socioeconomic adversity. Thus, this study is motivated by the urgent need to understand and address the interplay between assessment approaches, student motivation, and proficiency among undergraduate language students.

Research Questions

1. What are the assessment approaches employed in teaching English to language students at Babcock University?
2. What is the level of students' motivation towards English proficiency?
3. What is the level of English proficiency among undergraduate language students?
4. What is the influence of assessment approaches and student motivation on language students' English proficiency?

Methods

Research Design: This research adopted a descriptive research design to assess the interplay between assessment approaches, student motivation, and proficiency among undergraduate language students at Babcock University.

Sample and Sample Size: A total enumeration sampling method was adopted in all the 70 Language undergraduates in the Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University.

Instrumentation: The instrument used for this study is a structured survey questionnaire. The research instrument was divided into four sections.

Section A: This section elicited responses on demographic variables of participants like such as gender, religion, level, among others. The frequency distribution and personal profile of respondents showed that the majority of the participants aged 18-22 years (72.9%), 51 (72.9%) were females, 25 (35.7%) were in 300 level.

Section B: elicited information on English proficiency on a ten-item scale. The items were measured on 5 continuum scale ranging from 0 to 4 (Strongly Agreed = 1, and Strongly Disagreed = 0). The higher the score on the scale, the better the language proficiency.

Section C: elicited information on Language assessment mode (LAM) as perceived or experienced by the students. The LAMQ contains 8 items which are rated as a 5-point Likert-type instrument having responses ranging from SD = strongly disagree to SA = strongly agree. A significant test-retest reliability coefficient of .71 with a one-month inter-test interval was reported for the scale.

Section D: elicited information on the extent at which students were motivated to learn by the respondents. The 10 items were measured on 5 continuum scale ranging from 0 to 4 (SD = strongly disagree to SA = strongly agree). The scale has a test-retest reliability coefficient of .88 with a one-month

inter-test interval.

Method of Data Collection: The researcher administered the instruments to each of the sample respondents chosen. A period of two weeks was used in the administration of instrument and collection of data. The students were met in their lectures hall and the study was introduced to them, those that are not interested were allowed to leave the hall, instrument was administered to the remaining students. Both administration and collection was done the same day.

Method of Data Analysis: In this study, the data analysis tools adopted include descriptive and inferential statistics (simple linear regression analysis) was used at 5 percent level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) using the SPSS 27 version software.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive analysis on the assessment approaches employed in teaching English language

S/N		Mean	Std Dev
1	Formative assessment (classroom discussion, short quizzes, etc)	3.209	.882
2	Summative assessment (Presentations, term papers, final exams, etc)	3.431	.939
3	Diagnostic assessment (pre-tests, interview, survey, etc)	1.287	1.201
4	Performance-based (Projects, simulations, case studies)	1.458	2.098
5	Peer assessment (students assess each other's work)	2.987	1.154
6	Norm-referenced assessment (standardized tests or exams)	1.327	1.009
7	Criterion-referenced assessment (use of rubrics)	1.351	1.221
8	Self-assessment (students reflect on their own learn)	2.339	1.137

The outcome of the research question measuring the assessment approaches employed in teaching English Language to students at Babcock University revealed that in all the 8 items, only four (4) items have mean scores that are significant. Hence, the most common assessment approaches employed in teaching English Language are summative

assessment (3.431), formative assessment (3.209), peer assessment (2.987) and self-assessment (2.339). They are the top four ranked items. It could be said that summative assessment is mostly used. This is followed by formative assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis on the level of students' motivation towards English proficiency

S/N		Mean	Std Dev
1	Achieving high scores in my assessments e.g tests and quizzes encourage me to continue learning.	3.39	0.85
2	Timely feedback from my exams, quizzes and assignments help me set personal learning goals	3.19	0.83
3	I derive much pleasure from learning new things in English language	3.22	0.80
4	For the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges in the course of study	3.10	0.87
5	I feel satisfied with the experience from taking on interesting challenges in studying English Language	3.17	0.81
6	I want to succeed at this course of study, if not I would be very ashamed of myself	2.89	1.22

7	I want to be very good at this course of study, otherwise I would be very disappointed	2.81	1.07
8	Studying English is part of the way in which I have chosen to live my life.	3.24	0.97
9	I chose this course of study to attain my career goals	2.59	1.21
10	I don't know why, we are provided with unrealistic learning condition	1.56	1.07
Weighted mean score/percentage = 2.916 (72.9)			

The outcome of the research question measuring the level of students' motivation towards English proficiency revealed that more than three-quarter of the participants were motivated by achieving high scores in their assessments (3.39 ± 0.85), timely feedback from their exams, quizzes and assignments (3.19 ± 0.83), and derived much pleasure from learning new things in English language (3.22 ± 0.80). Others are: the satisfaction they experience from taking on

interesting challenges in their course of study (3.10 ± 0.87), satisfied with the experience from taking on interesting challenges in studying English Language (3.17 ± 0.81), and studying English is part of the way they have chosen to live their lives (3.24 ± 0.97). This study observed that the overall motivation level mean score 2.916 (72.9%) for English proficiency among the participants was moderately high.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis on the level of English proficiency

		Mean	Std Dev
1	I can identify the main idea of a text in English	3.77	1.09
2	I comprehend the main ideas and details of a passage in English materials I read easily	4.00	1.03
3	I can write coherently organized paragraphs in English.	3.40	1.04
4	I express my ideas and thoughts clearly in written English	4.00	1.02
5	I can express my ideas and opinions clearly in English.	4.00	1.27
6	I participate effectively in English discussions and conversations	4.00	0.91
7	I use appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in English	3.19	0.91
8	I listen, recognize, and use English idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms easily	3.77	0.96
9	I effectively listen for specific details and main ideas in English	3.51	0.92
10	I understand English speakers of different accents and dialects.	3.33	1.06
Mean/Std. Dev = 3.80±1.13			

Table 3 reveals the extent to which undergraduates are proficient in English language in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, with a mean score of 3.80, which is above the average. This study observed that the overall level

of English proficiency among the participants was 95% which signifies that the respondents level of English proficiency (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) was very good.

Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of the influence of assessment approaches and student motivation on language students' English proficiency

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	P
Regression	56.918	2	28.459	6.620	.000
Residual	288.033	67	4.299		
Total	344.951	69			
R = .583; Multiple R² = .340; Multiple R² (Adjusted) = .337; Stand error estimate = 2.987					

Table 4 shows that undergraduates' English proficiency yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (*R*) of .583 and a multiple regression square of .340. This shows that 34% of the

total variance in the undergraduates' English proficiency is accounted for by assessment approaches employed in teaching English language and students' motivation

towards English proficiency. The Table also indicates that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced an F-ratio value significant at .000 level ($F_{(2,67)} = 6.620$; $p = .000 < .05$). Therefore, academic assessment approaches employed in teaching English language and students' motivation combined to influence undergraduates' English proficiency.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The outcome of this study revealed that the most common assessment approaches employed in teaching English Language are summative assessment, formative assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment. This is in tandem with Kamara and Dadhabai (2022) summative assessment is the most important assessment that can influence students' academic achievement, followed by formative assessment while assessment strategies from lecturers influenced students negatively. It can be deduced that the effectiveness of different assessment modes significantly impacts academic success, with formative and summative assessments playing crucial roles. The choice and implementation of assessment methods are critical for gauging student learning and informing teaching practices.

The outcome of the second research question showed that the level of students' motivation towards English proficiency moderately high. This was reflected on their motivation based on their high scores in their assessments, timely feedback from their exams, pleasure from learning new things in English language, interests in their course of study, and studying English as part of the way they have chosen to live their lives. This implies motivation and interest are crucial for effective learning. Motivation drives the desire to learn, while interest makes learning engaging and enjoyable. When learners are motivated, they are more likely to invest effort, persevere through challenges, and achieve better learning outcomes. Interest, on the other hand, fuels curiosity and a deeper engagement with the learning material, leading to more meaningful and sustained learning. This result lend credence from the findings of Naeem et al (2022) that English Language Proficiency plays a significant role in enhancing students' academic motivation. Additionally, this present research was in line with Ayodele et al (2014) who found that motivation significantly impacts students' academic success, and can drive the students to improve their academic skills. This study observed that the overall level of English proficiency in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening was very good. This is because English proficiency is a crucial skill for academic success, career advancement, and overall communication in a globalized world. It corroborates the findings of Džuganová (2019) that good English proficiency enables medical professionals to open new horizons and provides opportunities to apply their knowledge

and skills. Also, Manuel (2022) reported that the respondents in his study demonstrated commendable performance along with grammar and reading comprehension. This displays that students have mastered the basic linguistic units which serve as the foundation in learning the English language.

Finally, the result that about 34% of the total variance in the undergraduates' English proficiency is accounted for by assessment approaches employed in teaching English language and students' motivation towards English proficiency. This implies that method of assessment and student's motivation are key English proficiency among students. Additionally, motivation fuels a student's desire to learn, engage with academic tasks, and ultimately, perform well. Motivated students are more likely to develop effective learning habits, pursue goals with persistence, and experience a greater sense of well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that assessment modes and motivation play a significant role in English proficiency among students. Therefore, formative assessment (ongoing) and summative assessments (end-of-course) are both valuable. Effective assessment should identify student strengths and weaknesses, inform instruction, and provide actionable insights for improvement. Additionally, motivated students are more likely to develop effective learning habits, pursue goals with persistence, and experience a greater sense of well-being.

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