CORRELATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE WITH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A STUDY OF COMMUNICATION STUDENTS IN A STATE UNIVERSITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

This study looked into the level of English language usage (ELU) of the 71 Mass Communication students enrolled in the second semester of SY 2013-2014 at the College of Arts and Sciences of the Isabela State University in the Philippines. It determined if the students' English usage scores differed significantly when grouped according to year level. The study also aimed to find out the correlation between the students' ELU scores and their academic achievement as indicated by General Weighted Average (GWA) and the correlation between ELU scores and their grades in Math, specifically in Algebra and Trigonometry and their grade in Science, specifically in Biology. A standardized 40-item ELU Test was administered to the students to determine their ELU level. The students' GWA and grades in the three subjects were secured from the Registrar's Office. Findings show that students have moderate level of English usage and that only the scores of the freshmen and the seniors differed significantly. There is a high significant correlation between the students' ELU scores and their academic achievement. Also, there is a high significant correlation between ELU score and their grade in Science, and between ELU score and their grade in Mathematics. Findings imply that competency in English determines students' academic achievement. Any student who is good in English may be good as well in Science and Mathematics. Curriculum and syllabi planners should offer more English enhancement activities among college freshmen to improve their English competency and thus ensure academic success.

Keywords: English Language Usage, Academic Achievement, Grade Weighted Average, Correlation.

INTRODUCTION:

The importance of English language for enhancing educational attainment through improved communication ability can never be overemphasized. Students who have difficulties in the English language may not function effectively not only in English subjects but in other subjects taught in English as well, such as Science and Mathematics. How well students fare in the academics, therefore, depends largely on their level of proficiency in English language. Linking these two variables, Maleki and Zangani (2007) as cited by Sahragard et al (2011) explained that when students have difficulties in understanding the contents and concepts of subjects presented in the English language, their academic performance would be affected in a negative way.

As to the reasons for students' lack of mastery of English language, Iliyas (2011), studying the use of the English program by the College of Education in Nigeria, claimed that this problem may be traced to students' inadequate understanding of the teacher's speech (listening problem) resulting from poor vocabulary and syntactic knowledge (note-taking problem), and deficient language background which compromise students' comprehension. lliyas further claimed that this deficiency in the English language could be attitudinal because many students regarded proficient knowledge of English language as only subordinate to the mastery of their main course of study.

But English competency cannot be ignored; it seems to have a link too with students' performance in Science and Mathematics. In Aina et al's (2013) descriptive research among a sample of College of Education students in Nigeria, a strong positive correlation between English proficiency and students' performance in Science and Technical courses existed; those who passed English subjects performed better in science and technical courses than those who failed in these subjects. Considering the implications of their findings, Aina et al forwarded that proficiency in English language should be required for all students in Science and Technical education.

The Isabela State University (ISU) is a tertiary learning institution in the northern part of the Philippines. There have been a handful of language researchers in this University who have realized the importance of acquiring competency in English as a second language who conducted studies on students' level of English proficiency. Yasto (2001) studied college freshmen's English communicative competence and she revealed that the students knew only "some" of English grammar and they committed many mistakes in grammar. Similar results were revealed by Blas (2005) in her study among 300 college freshmen of this University. Her findings showed that students had difficulty identifying errors in English sentences as shown in their below the fifty percent proficiency level which could be attributed to their weak foundation in grammar. However, these local studies, though informative, did not attempt to correlate English competency with academic achievement. Questions relating to students' academic achievement have always baffled teachers. But with studies connecting this variable to English proficiency, students' performance may no longer be an enigma to teachers. This present study, therefore, could lead to a greater recognition of the importance of stressing English competency among students, teachers, curriculum planners and school administrators. It sought to find out the correlation between students' English language usage score and their academic achievement. Specifically, it aimed to: evaluate the level of English language usage of AB Mass Communication students of the College of Arts and Sciences; assess the academic achievement of these students as of the second semester of SY 2013-2014 in terms of their General Weighted Average; determine the students' academic performance in Mathematics and in Science; determine the correlation between the students' scores in the English language usage test and their overall academic achievement and; determine the correlation between the students' scores in the English language usage test and their academic achievement in Science and Mathematics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Descriptive correlational research design was utilized for this study. A complete enumeration of the AB Mass Communication students at the College of Arts and Sciences in Isabela State University at Echague who were enrolled in the second semester of SY 2013-2014 were the subjects of this study, distributed as follows: 21 freshmen; 17 sophomores; 15 juniors and 18 seniors. They were asked to answer a 40-item standardized Language Usage Test consisting of sentences that are divided into four parts. In many of the sentences, one of the four parts contains an error in grammar, punctuation or capitalization. Also, they were instructed to decide which one of the four parts, if any, contains an error and to encircle the letter under the incorrect part. If there is no error in the sentence, they were to encircle the choice "No Error". To determine the students' level of English language usage (ELU), each item was given one (1) point for a total of 40 points and the following scale was used: scores of 19 and below means low level of usage; scores from 20 to29, moderate level; and scores from 30 to 40, high level of usage. Students' grade weighted average (GWA) from all the subjects they

have already taken as of the second semester of SY 2013-2014 were secured from the database of ISU Registrar's Office. Their grades in Algebra and Trigonometry were averaged to represent their performance in Mathematics while their grade in Biology was taken to represent their grade in Science. Data gathered were analyzed using the SPSS software. Frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviation were used to present the students' ELU scores, GWA and grades in Science and Mathematics. To compare the students' level of English usage across year level, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. Tukey-Honestly Significant Difference (Tukey-HSD) Test with significance level at .05 was used to determine which groups differed significantly. To determine the relationship between English language usage scores and Grade Weighted Average (GWA) as well as English usage score and performance in Science and Mathematics, Pearson correlation coefficient formula (r) was employed. Regression analysis was used to determine whether the students' language usage score was a good predictor of their overall academic achievement and their achievement in Mathematics and Science.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE:

As can be shown in Table 1, the average language usage score of AB Mass Communication students was 20.42 or 51 % of the total score. Comparing the mean scores, senior students delivered the highest mean score of 22.22 which is 55.5% of the total items while their freshmen counterpart got the lowest, which represents 44.5% of the total score. As to the level of English usage, the freshmen students have low usage level while their older counterparts have moderate usage level. These findings somehow indicate that the language usage of the students tends to increase as a function of their exposure to higher English-enhancing subjects and activities. However, they also indicate that there is a need for more intervention on the part of the curriculum planners and English teachers to further hone these students' hold of the language. Using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test for significant differences among the mean scores, the same table shows that students' mean scores on the English Usage test differed significantly ($F=2.853$, $p=.044<.05$). Subjecting the mean scores to Tukey-Honestly Significant Difference (Tukey-HSD) test revealed that only the scores of two groups--the freshmen and the seniors-- differed significantly.

Table 1: Summary statistics of the students' ELU score by year level

Year Level	Mean Score	Level of English Usage	F ratio	F prob.
Freshmen	17.76[a]	Low	2.853*	0.044
Sophomore	21.24[b]	Moderate		
Junior	21.07[c]	Moderate		
Senior	22.22[a]	Moderate		
Overall	**20.42**	**Moderate**		

*Significant Means with the same letters are significantly different.

STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:

AB Mass Communication students' Grade Weighted Averages (GWA) have a mean of 2.10 and a standard deviation of 0.358 which shows that their grades, appearing to be proximate to the mean, exhibited homogeneity. Their overall mean grades in Mathematics and Science were 2.43 and 2.02, respectively. Their grades in Mathematics showed more dispersion (s=0.437) from the mean compared to their grades in Science, which exhibited a standard deviation of 0.352 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Summary statistics for GWA, Grade in Mathematics and in Science

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Grade Weighted Average (GWA)	2.10	0.358
Grade in Mathematics	2.43	0.437
Grade in Science	2.02	0.352

CORRELATION AND REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE (ELU) AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:

Academic performance in Isabela State University is assessed by grades on a scale from 1.0, being the highest grade, to 5.0, the lowest. Each subject carries a certain weight (2 units– 5 units) and the more units a subject carries, the more influence it has on a student's GWA. In this grading system, the lower the actual value of GWA, the higher is the student's academic achievement. Thus, the negative sign of the computed Pearson r value does not indicate an inverse relationship between the two variables, rather a positive relationship. In relating the English language usage scores and the students' academic achievement measured by their GWA, results of the Pearson correlation coefficient test shows r value of 0.717 which reveals a strong correlation. Further test of significance shows a highly significant correlation between the two variables (p=.000 <.05). As for language usage and achievement in Mathematics, although the computed r value of 0.417 indicates a low correlation, test of significance shows a p=.000<.05, indicating high significant correlation between English competency and achievement in Mathematics. Results obtained in relating English usage with students' grades in Science shows a computed r value of 0.615 indicating moderate but highly significant correlation (p =.000<.05). These suggest that the more competent the students were in English, the higher were their grades in Mathematics and Science. It may thus be said that proficiency in English could determine a student's success in these fields.

Table 3: Correlation between the students' ELU score and Academic Achievement

Variable	r-value	p-value
Grade Weighted Average (GWA)	-0.717*	0.000
Grade in Mathematics	-0.417*	0.000
Grade in Science	-0.615*	0.000

*Significant

To further validate these findings, regression analysis was run to determine the effect of the students' language usage scores on their academic achievement. The language usage score was treated as the independent variable (X) while academic performance was the dependent variable (Y). Table 6 shows the effect of the students' language usage scores on their academic achievement. The r-squared value of 0.514 indicates that the students' language usage score contributes about 51.4 % (0.514 x 100) in the variation on their Grade Weighted Average. The regression equation, Y=3.084 -0.048X is significant (F=72.941, p=0.000), implying that the students' English usage score is indeed a good predictor of their Grade Weighted Average (Table 4).

Table 4: Regression Analysis on the effect of the students' ELU scores (X) on their academic achievement (Y)

Variable (Y)	Regression Equation	r-squared	F	Sig.
Grade Weighted Average	Y = 3.084 -0.048X	0.514	72.941*	0.000
Grade in Mathematics	Y = 3,129 - 0.034X	0.378	41.859*	0.000
Grade in Science	Y = 2.848 - 0.041X	0.174	14.496*	0.000

*Significant

Similarly, the r-squared value of 0.378 for Mathematics shows that the students' language usage scores contributed 37.8% in the variation on their performance in this field, with the regression equation Y= 3,129 - 0.034X shown to be significant (F=72.941, p=0.000). The regression equation for Grade in Science also proved to be significant, with the r squared value of 17.4 % (.174 X100) indicating the contribution of the students' language usage score to the variation on their grades in Science. These imply that the students' English usage score is indeed a good predictor of their performance in both Mathematics and the Sciences. This is further shown in Table 7 in which as English usage score increases, the students' predicted academic performance measured by GWA, and their grades in Mathematics and Science improve too.

Table 7: Predicted Academic Performance from English Usage Scores of the Students.

Scores (X)	Academic Performance (Y)		
	GWA	Mathematics	Science
	Y = 3.084 -0.048X	Y = 3,129 - 0.034X	Y = 2.848 - 0.041X
29	1.69	2.14	1.66
28	1.74	2.18	1.70
27	1.79	2.21	1.74
26	1.84	2.25	1.78
25	1.88	2.28	1.82
24	1.93	2.31	1.86
15	2.36	2.62	2.23
12	2.51	2.72	2.36
8	2.70	2.86	2.52

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings indicate that significant differences among the mean scores of the freshmen and the seniors differed significantly. In relating English language usage scores and academic achievement, findings showed that the two variables exhibited highly significant correlation. Likewise, correlation analysis of the language usage score and academic achievement in Science and Mathematics indicated a highly significant correlation. Regression analysis further confirms that the students' English usage score is a good predictor of their overall academic achievement and of their performance in both Mathematics and the Sciences. As their English usage score increases, their GWA, grades in Mathematics and grades in Science increase too. Curriculum planners and teachers of English should plan intervention activities to improve English usage of the students and create programs to hone the English proficiency of freshmen students so that they would be better equipped as they go up the higher years, thereby ensuring academic success.

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