

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOMALIA

Abdirahman M. Addow¹, Abdullahi Hussein Abubakar², Mohamed Said Abukar³

Faculty of Business and Accountancy, SIMAD University, Mogadishu,
SOMALIA.

¹ foodcadd50@hotmail.com, ² binhussein014@gmail.com, ³ dhiblawe37@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between English language proficiency (as measured by the English language GPA the student obtains from his/her secondary school) and academic achievement (as measured by the student's GPA from the examination in the first semester) of undergraduate students in Somalia. Sample size of 100 students was selected from SIMAD University students, especially faculty of business and accountancy final year students. Both primary and secondary data was used in order to answer research questions. Questionnaire and content analysis were used as a research instruments. It has been identified that there are other factors, other than English language proficiency, that affect students' academic performance, the results revealed that English language proficiency has insignificant positive relation with their academic achievement and that there is an insignificant impact of English language proficiency on student' academic achievement. Based on these findings, it is recommended to give a special attention to the students' preparation for post secondary studies, improve students' study skills and the overall factors that determine students' academic achievement.

Keywords: English language proficiency, Academic achievement, undergraduate students, Somalia

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing number of international students travelling to well-developed countries for higher education, research has increasingly begun to focus on these students' academic acculturation to their new learning environments. Indeed, identifying the factors most closely related to academic success and the impact of English on the academic performance, has significance for the international education community as a whole, for individual institutions of higher learning and, of course, for the students themselves (Fox, Chen, Berman, Song and Myles, nd). In 2003 to 2004, a huge number of international students were enrolled in U.S. universities and colleges. They not have become important financial resources for U.S higher education institutes only, but also have contributed to U.S research development. Such an entry has without doubt raised researchers' interests in international students' academic performance and adjustment problems. Scholars have studied possible factors associated with foreign students' academic achievement. Specifically, language has been proven to be one of the most important factors in international students' academic performance (Chen & Sun,nd.).

Based on these evidences, there are considerable studies conducted in this area. Wille (2006) studied the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement of students at secondary level and found that there is a positive relation between these two variables. Shahragerd, Baharloo and Ali (2011) investigated the relationship between academic achievement and language proficiency of Iranian college students at Shiraz

University in Iran; they revealed that there is a significant positive relation between language proficiency and academic achievement.

In Africa, Orgunsiji & O (2009) argue that English language plays the fundamental roles of being the means of instruction in Nigerian schools from primary to tertiary level. The knowledge of the contents of school subjects is transferred to the students at all levels of education via English language medium. It therefore follows that how well students would fare in academic achievement depends largely on their level of proficiency in English language which is the medium of instruction. Orgunsiji and O (2009) assert that their results showed that “there is a significant impact of English language proficiency on students’ overall academic achievement and that English language proficiency of the students has a significant positive relationship with their overall academic achievement”.

In Somalia, to the researchers’ best knowledge; there is no evidence in the literature with regard to studies that study the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement of Somali higher education students, because of shortage or lack of academic publications in the country; thus this current study examines the relationship between these two variables.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is derived from the multiple intelligence theory discovered by a psychologist, Howard Gardner, in 1983 in his book, *Frames of Mind*. The theory suggests that “there are at least seven ways that people have of perceiving and understanding the world”. Gardner labels “each of these ways a distinct 'intelligence' -- in other words, a set of skills allowing individuals to find and resolve genuine problems they face” (discover-multiple-intelligences.com, 2012).

One of these ways of intelligence is Linguistic intelligence that “involves sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively use language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically; and language as a means to remember information. Writers, poets, lawyers and speakers are among those that Howard Gardner sees as having high linguistic intelligence. (infed.org). The reason of adopting this theory is that it is related to the variable in study.

English language proficiency or linguistic proficiency referred the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Blagojevich, Ruiz and Dunn (2004), English language proficiency: English language learners’ communication information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of social studies. Limited English proficient student is defined as a student whose first language is a language other than English who is unable to perform ordinary classroom works in English (Driscoll, 2003). The definition of English language proficiency adopted in this study is the ability to perform the classroom works in English, since this definition associates to the other variable in the study (academic achievement). In this study, English language proficiency will be characterized by Grade Point Average (GPA) of English language subject in secondary schools.

Academic achievement is the outcome of education-the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Wikipedia, 2012). In this study the definition of “the outcome of education-the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals” is adopted. In this study academic achievement will be characterized by the Grade Point Average (GPA) the student obtained from his/her post-secondary studies

Collier (1995) asserts that a research indicates that it takes four to twelve years of second language development for the most advantaged students to reach a level of academic proficiency in which they can compete with native speakers (cited in Wille, 2006). According to Thomas and Collier (1998), the average native English speaker gains about ten months of academic growth in one month of the academic year (as cited in Wille, 2006).

Low language proficiency has been considered a barrier to learning and academic success at the higher education level, where universities require students seeking admission to obtain a score on English language proficiency tests to indicate that they can academically succeed (Williams, Powers, Kong & Starr, 2012). To have skills to compete with those of native English speakers, English language learner students must make nine years progress in six years (Wille, 2006). In other words, English natives need six years to progress whereas English non-natives need nine years to progress like English natives.

The poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education (Orgunsiji & O, 2009). Zangani and Maleki (2007) examined, having difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum taught in the target language (English language) seems to be one of the most serious problems that students face in their particular course of study.

As a preliminary study indicates, students at undergraduate studies in Somalia may face difficulty to succeed academically concerning their English language proficiency. Therefore, in the view of this discrepancy, there is a need to investigate the relationship between the English language proficiency and academic achievement of Somali higher education student(s). The objective of this study is to examine the effect of English language proficiency on academic achievement.

English Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

Determinants of student performance have attracted the attention of academic researchers from many areas. They have tried to determine which variables impact student performance in positive and negative direction (Haydar & Uyar, 2011). Language has been proven to be one of the most important factors in international students' academic performance (Chen & Sun, nd.).

Many scholars investigated the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Wille (2006) studied the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement of Hispanic students at secondary level in the United States. He found that there is a positive relation between these two variables.

Sahragard, et al. (2011) carried out a research aimed to find out the relationship between Iranian college students' language proficiency and their academic achievement selecting a sample of 151 college students majoring in English literature at Shiraz University, Iran. They found the existence of a significant positive relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement.

Orgunsiji & O (2009) examined the extent to which Nigerian secondary school students' proficiency in English predicted their overall academic achievement. They proportionately sampled 400 students from eight randomly selected secondary schools; they found that English proficiency has significant impact on students' overall academic achievement. They

also found that English language proficiency has significant relationship with their overall academic achievement. This study is more relevant than that conducted by Sahragard et al. (2011), since this study can be generalized according to the scope and the sample size.

Kong et al. (2012) investigated the use of English language proficiency to predict the future academic success of English learner (EL) students. Their study revealed that English language proficiency is a factor of prediction for future academic success. Zangani and Maleki (2007) asserted that one of the most serious problems that Iranian EFL students face in their field of study is their inability to communicate and handle English which will influence their academic success; they carried out a survey intended to examine the strength of the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. Accordingly, the relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement was examined in their study, and a significant connection was found between proficiency and grade point averages (GPA) of academic achievement. Similarly, the results revealed significant correlation between English language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subjects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Research Design

Correlation research design is employed for this study where an independent variable explains a dependent variable. In this study, the main purpose is to explain the relationship between two quantifiable variables (English language proficiency and academic achievement). Therefore, this design is considered to be suitable for because it is to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between English language proficiency and academic achievement also we used descriptive research design to identify the factors influence the students' academic achievement the sample consisted of 100 final year business and accountancy students selected from SIMAD University. Of the 100 participants, of this number, 18% was female and the remaining was male. This sample size has been chosen according to the literature. Previous studies took sample sizes between 50-150 like Fox et al. (nd), 101, Vázquez & López (1997), 100, Zangani and Maleki (2007), 50, Sahragard et al. (2011), 151. The average of these samples gives 100.

Sampling Technique

This study employed purposive sampling technique to select the sample size considering the availability and the reliability of the data to be collected; researchers prefer to use purposive sampling technique so that an informative data can be collected to answer the research questions.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect the important factors that may affect academic achievement of Somali higher education students. The target population is also literate and is unlike to have difficulties responding to questionnaire items. The questionnaire was adopted based on the literature. Oso and Onen (2008) defined document analysis as critical examination of public or private recorded information related to the issue under study. Its purpose is to obtain unobtrusive information at the pleasure of the researcher and without interrupting the researcher. Since the study concerns about students' GPA (Great Point Average), researchers prefer to obtain the exact information so the reliability can be increased.

Data Analysis

Correlation (r) analysis was used to analyze the data to describe the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement also descriptive data analysis was used to identify factors effecting academic achievement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Data

This study was conducted in SIMAD University, Business and Accounting students, especially last semester students. Hundred participants have participated in this study. The demographic data of participants are presented below

Table1 shows that the majority of the respondents were male; they represent 82% of the participants where female represented by 18% of the participants. This indicates that both genders have participated in this study. In terms of Age Participants were asked their ages in the questionnaire; they were offered to select the appropriate category that matches their ages. The table below displays the results of the participants' ages. Table 1 indicates that 66% of the participants were 20-25 years old, 32% were between 26-30 were 2% were the ages between 31-35 years. This shows that most participants are young people. In terms of marital status 60% of the participants were single where 40% were married.

Table 1. Demographic profile

	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	82	82%
	Female	18	18%
	<i>Total</i>	100	
<i>Age</i>	20-25	66	66%
	26-30	32	32%
	31-35	2	2%
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	60	60%
	Married	40	40%
	<i>Total</i>	100	

(Primary Data, 2013)

The Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Analysis to examine the degree of relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Linear Regression Analysis was also done to determine the impact of English language proficiency on students overall academic achievement at 0.05 level.

Table 2. Level of Students' Proficiency in English

	<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
English Secondary Level	100	32	100	83.80

The results in the above table show that the scores ranged from a minimum of 32 to a maximum of 100, with an average score of 83.80%. This shows that the students English language proficiency is above average.

Table 3. English language proficiency and the academic achievement

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Average Academic Performance</i>	<i>English proficiency Scores</i>
	Pearson Correlation	1	0.296
Average Academic Performance	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.003
	N	100	100

Table 3 reveals that there is significant but weak positive relationship between proficiency in English language and the students' academic performance ($r = 0.296$; $P < .01$). The positive relationship implies that the more proficient students are in English language, the better the academic performance of such students. However, this result dictates that English language proficiency of Somali higher education students is more likely not to predict the academic performance of such students.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of data analysis demonstrated that the null-hypothesis of this study, which asserts, "there is a relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement" was confirmed at ($r=0.296$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, there is a relationship between these two variables; in other words, the English language proficiency correlates positively with the academic success. However, although this relationship is a positive relation, it is not meaningful. In other words, according to this study, proficiency in English does not guarantee success in academic performance. The findings from the study revealed that there is weak relationship between English language Proficiency and academic achievements of the subjects studied ($r = 0.296$). This suggests that as English proficiency increases, it does not mean that academic performance will increase. The results are in keeping with other studies indicating that variables other than language proficiency are relevant.

This findings support the view of the researchers that there is relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Ogunsiji & O (2009) investigated the relationship between english language proficiency and academic achievement of among EFL students in Nigeria, The results showed that English language proficiency of the students has a significant positive relationship with their overall academic achievement and that there is a significant impact of English language proficiency on students overall academic achievement. Also this study supported our findings which investigated the relationship between Iranian college students' language proficiency and their academic achievement (Sahragard, Baharloo and Soozandehfar, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted in SIMAD University with 100 participants from last semester Business and Accountancy students. The research concluded that: There are factors (other than English language proficiency) that are more predictable in academic performance. English language proficiency has weak affect on the students' performance of Somali higher education students. There is weak relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance of Somali higher education students.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, N., Salamat, A. A., Mokhtar, N., Jussof, K. & Ali, S. (2009). The Factors Influencing Students' Performance at University Teknologi MARA Kedah, Malaysia. *Management Science and Engineering*, 3(4).
- [2] Al-Tamimi, H. A. & Al-Shayeb, A. (2002). Factors Affecting Student Performance in the Introductory Finance Course. *Journal of Economic & Administrative Sciences*, 18(2).
- [3] Anas, A. M. (2011). Internal Control Systems of Somali Higher Education. *Somali Business Review*, 2(14), 13-15.
- [4] Blagojevich, R. R., Ruiz, J. & Dunn, R. J. (2004). *Illinois English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners (K-12)*. Chicago: Illinois State Board of Education.
- [5] Chen, Y. & Sun, C. (nd). Language proficiency and Academic Performance.
- [6] Cook, H. G., Timothy, B., & Lundberg, T. (2011). *Academic achievement for English learners; What can we reasonably expect?* University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- [7] Driscoll, D. P. (2003). *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners*. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education.
- [8] Fox, J., Cheng, L., Berman, R., Song, X. & Myles, J. (nd). Cost and Benefits: English for Academic Purposes Instruction in Canada. *Carleton Papers in Applied Language Studies*.
- [9] Gure, A. A., Artan, N. O. & Adan, N. A. (2012). *Motivation and its effect on Nurses' performance in Mogadishu (Madina Hospital)*. SIMAD University.
- [10] Haydar, A. & Uyar, A. (2011). Factors Associated with Student Performance in Financial Accounting Course. *European Journal of Economic & Political Studies*, 4 (2).
- [11] Jones, C. K. (2006). *The Relationship between Language Proficiency, General Intelligence, and Reading Achievement with Sample of Low Performing, Limited English Proficiency Student*. Texas A&M University.
- [12] Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.
- [13] Li, G., Chen, W. & Duanmu, J.-L. (2010). Determinants of International Students' Academic Performance: A Comparison between Chinese and Other International Students. *Journal of Studies in International*, 14(4), 389-405.
- [14] Nuthanap, G. (2007). *Gender Analysis of Academic Achievement Among High School Students*. University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad.
- [15] Orgunsiyi, Y. & O, F. D. (2009). English Language Proficiency as a predictor of Academic Achievement among EFL students in Nigeria. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 37(3), 490-495.

- [16] Oso, W. Y. & Onen, D. (2008). *A General Guid to Writing Resaerch Proposal and Report. A Hand Book for Beginning Researchers* (2nd Edn.). Kampala: MakerereUniversity.
- [17] Sahragard, R., Baharloo, A. & Ali, S. M. (2011). A Closer Look at the Relationship Between Academic Achievement and Language Proficiency among Iranian EFL Students. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(12), 1740-1748.
- [18] Saundes, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- [19] *Wikipedia*. (2012). Retrieved October 2012, from <http://www.wikipadea.com>
- [20] Wille, J. R. (2006). *Measuring the Academic Achievement and English language Proficincy of Students at Secondary level*. University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- [21] Williams, N., Powers, S., Kong, J. & Star, L. (2012, April). Connecting English Language Learning and Academic Performance: A Prediction Study. *American Educational Research Association*.
- [22] Zangani, E. & Maleki, A. (2007). A Survey on the Relationship between English Language Proficiency and the Academic Achievement of Iranian EFL Students. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1).