

Proficiency in English and Environmental Factors: A Case Study of Selected Senior Secondary Schools in Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

Social and linguistic environments influence proficiency in English. Hence, proficiency in the English language is a product of contextual factors. The significance of these environmental factors is palpable in the learning and teaching of the English language in schools. This paper, therefore, examined the extent to which social and linguistic factors influenced language proficiency in selected secondary schools in Owerri, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire employed in getting effective response from English teachers in the schools. The correlation analysis using Pearson Product moment and normal P-P plot for regression standard residual was employed for the analysis of variables in the questionnaire. Results indicated that social and linguistic factors were highly significant in relation to proficiency in English. Thus, predicators variables influenced proficiency in English. Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that social and linguistic factors play crucial roles in proficiency in the English language at the secondary school level. Therefore, a conducive environment can help students to overcome major challenges in learning English.

Keywords: Proficiency; Environment; Linguistic; Factors; Students.

Introduction

It is fundamental for learners in the Nigerian setting to communicate in English proficiently considering the roles English play in the country as the official language, language of education, language of commerce and industry and the language of the media. Therefore, for the learners to excel in all spheres of human endeavors, proficiency in English is pivotal. Student's proficiency in English is a yardstick for academic competence. Proficiency in English is also required for learning other subjects in the school curriculum. So, it is the hallmark for scholarship and communicative competence. Furthermore, it helps students to attain personal creativity and gives a lot of room for academic development. Thus, Aina, Ogundele & Olanipekun (2013) state that when students' proficiency is high, it will definitely affect and improve academic performance of such students. Similarly lack of proficiency in English affects students academic performance adversely (Aina, Ogundele & Olanipekun 2013).

Moreover, Hoa, Dung, Huong and Loan (2020) reiterate that language proficiency is one of the important factors that help students to adapt to life and work in future. It has been discovered that some learners of the English language in the secondary schools especially the state secondary schools in Nigeria are not proficient in the English language because they are faced with unfavourable environmental conditions that hinder their proficiency. Social and linguistic environments that are not conducive to language learning affect students' proficiency. The informal settings in language learning constitute the social environment. Therefore Okoro & Nnajieta (2015) stress that informal settings such as the market, home or the street, the affective variables of attitude and motivation come into play in the attainment of language competence. Social context plays a fundamental role in the decision to learn and acquire competence in a second language situation (Okoro & Nnajieta 2015). Also the values attached to target language the expectations and cultural beliefs of the social context influence the features of the learner, his intelligence, aptitude, motivation and anxiety. The linguistic environment of a student constitutes the parents' educational level, the degree and nature of linguistic exposure the student gets, the parents' beliefs and interests as regards the students' linguistic development as well as the culture the student is exposed to (Kanfo Hutten & Lasso 2013). The linguistic environment plays a crucial role in learning English. Some learners of English as a second language thrive on speaking the Pidgin English and other indigenous languages both in the classroom and outside the classroom setting. Some rarely discuss in good English as a result of peer group influence.

Kondo (2018) asserts that the social environment plays a major role in an individual's cognitive and affective development. Hoa, Dung, Huong and Loan (2020) remark that language proficiency is best enhanced through active and frequent use of the language and it is vital to provide the students with maximum exposure to the English language as well as meaningful and purposeful activities through which they can learn and use the language. Even for external examination, Ozuwuba (2018) stresses that limited proficiency in English is one of the reasons for low scores in West African Senior School Certificate Examination. Also Punde (2017) states that proficiency in the English language is a critical component of a successful modern society since English skills are very necessary for any nation to fully benefit from global commerce; have access to latest science, technology and innovation and to exert influence in the world. Hence, it is critical to

examine the environmental factors that mar or improve learners' proficiency. Brito (2017) sees language environment as a factor which significantly affects language proficiency. Also Subbhuraan and Ananthasayam (2010) state that social environmental factors determine an individual's socio-psychological perspective and cannot be overlooked. In the same vein, Jalaluddin, Aval & Baker (2009) remark that social surroundings create a conducive and exciting platform for the learning and teaching of English. Furthermore, Amn and El-Karfa (2021) reiterate that the environment either provides a healthy, comfortable, safe and secure space for students or hinders effective performance and therefore the development of English is a product of contextual factors. Social and linguistic factors improve or hinder proficiency in English.

To pursue this research, two research questions are hereby posited.

1. To what extent does proficiency improve students' overall cognition?
2. To what extent do social and linguistic environments improve proficiency in English?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding the study is Interaction Hypothesis. This theory affirms that language proficiency is improved by face to face interaction and communication. The interaction hypothesis, proposed by Hong, (1996) stresses the crucial role social and linguistic environments play in language development. Thus Flynn (2020) asserts that interaction hypothesis recognizes that human beings have a genetic predisposition for language development and the social environment plays a vital role in the full development of language abilities. Castro-Prezi (2013) states that interactionists focus on collaborative learning which is the idea that conversations can help learners to develop both cognitively and linguistically. Thus, the interactionists see the use of language as an activity which is learnt during interaction and the environmental factors play dominant roles in the second language acquisition.

Furthermore, Gas (2010) states that the interaction approach considers the production of language as constructs that are important in understanding second language learning. Therefore, social interaction influences human communication and language learning (Verga & Kotz, 2013). Castro-Prezi (2013) reiterates that language develops from interaction of biological cognitive and environmental influences and that language development cannot be separated from social contexts.

This theory is relevant to the study because the research paper examined the crucial roles the social and linguistic settings play in improving and hindering proficiency in the English language and this is exactly what the interaction hypothesis postulates.

Methodology

Research Population

This study was focused on students' proficiency in the English language in the senior secondary schools in Imo State. These students offer English as a compulsory subject. Since their teachers listen to them speak and interact in the English language, they are the best arbiters to determine

the students' proficiency. Therefore, the population constitutes teachers teaching English languages in these schools.

Research Sample

The purposive sampling method was employed to select ten state and private secondary schools as well as two hundred teachers from the schools in Owerri Municipality. Using this technique, the research sample size of two hundred teachers was employed.

Instruments for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a set of questionnaire on the effects of social and linguistic environments on students' proficiency. Therefore, the questionnaire was a 12-item, four-point modified likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

Research Design

The researchers utilized a quantitative/statistical approach to examine the environmental factors that hinder and improve language proficiency. The approach used in the research was to empirically answer the research questions. Here, correlation analysis using Pearson Product moment and normal P- P Plot for regression standard residual was employed for the analysis of variables in the questionnaire. The following below were the format applied to realize result:

$\hat{y} = \beta_2 + \beta_2 x$, fixes a line which passes through the samples scatter of x , y space. The correlation coefficient indicates the "closeness" of the scatter about the fitted regression line.

$$R^2 = \frac{n \sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{(n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2)(n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2)}}$$

In analyzing the data collected on the primary source of measure of discrepancy between the observed and the expected frequencies is applied, which is known as Chi-square (X^2). The observed frequency has already been documented, while the expected frequencies are then derived from the observed frequencies. Then summing up the relative discrepancy that is, we would arrive at Chi-square value.

Mathematically, Chi-square (X^2) is represented by:

$$X^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^c \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}}$$

where;

O_{ij} and E_{ij} are the observed and expected frequencies in the j_{th} row and j_{th} column respectively.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table for simple regression can be constructed as:

Source of Variation (SV)	Sum of squares (SS)	Degree of Freedom (DF)	Mean square (MS)	Variance Ratio (F)
Regression	SSR	1	$MSR = \frac{SSR}{1}$	$F = \frac{MSR}{MSE}$
Error	SSE	$n - 2$	$nSE = \frac{SSE}{n - 2}$	
Total	SST	$n - 1$	-	

$F = \frac{MSR}{MSE}$ Has F – distribution with 1 and n -2 degrees of freedom. To test the hypothesis at a pre-selected significance level, the computed ratio F is compared with the critical F obtained from table of F-distribution.

If F computed exceeds the tabulated F-tabulated, the Null hypothesis of no linear relationship between X and Y is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

Method of Data Collection

Ten secondary schools in Owerri Municipality were visited for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. The researchers administered the questionnaire to 200 teachers who teach the English language in Senior Secondary School I and 2.

Results

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH	12.16	2.646	170
LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	10.91	2.383	170
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	10.77	3.287	170

The table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the study variables with mean and standard deviation indicated for the 170 respondents out of the 200.

Table 2 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
1	.716 ^a	.513	.507	1.857	.513	88.033	2

a. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT, LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

b. Dependent Variable: PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

The table 2 indicates the coefficient of determinant (Pearson Product Moment) of 71.6% reliability strength of the model for the study. This shows how good our analysis has shown for the subject matter.

Table 3 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	607.330	2	303.665	88.033	.000 ^b
	Residual	576.058	167	3.449		
	Total	1183.388	169			

a. Dependent Variable: PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

b. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT, LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

The table 3 indicates the analysis of variance of the overall study, which is significant as p-value < 0.05. The result indicates that social and linguistic factors are highly significant in relation to proficiency in English. It is evident in the study that the predictors variable influence the proficiency in English, this could also be seen in Castro- Prezi (2013).

Table 4 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	11.798	.752		15.696	.000
LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	.539	.061	.485	8.794	.000
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	-.512	.044	-.636	-11.524	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

It is of statistical interest to show the linear relationship of the study variable, from the coded questionnaire for the 170 respondents across the area of study. Table 4 indicates the regression model for the variables used in the study. The result obtained indicated great significant as all the dependent variable is highly significant as p-value is less than 0.05. This is also true that linguistic and social environment have a linear relationship with proficiency in English. However, this provides answers to the research question with respect to linguistic and social environments as they improve proficiency. The variables are also highly significant.

Table 5 Correlations

		PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH	LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH	Pearson Correlation	1	.355**	-.536**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	170	170	170
LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT	Pearson Correlation	.355**	1	.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.008

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	N	170	170	170
	Pearson Correlation	-.536**	.204**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.008	
	N	170	170	170

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 indicates the correlation coefficient, which shows the degree of association of the study variable (social and linguistic factors) to the subject matter. The hypothesis exist that there is a significant influence of the independent variable on the proficiency in English at 0.01 level. The Pearson’s correlation coefficient is highly significant (**).

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

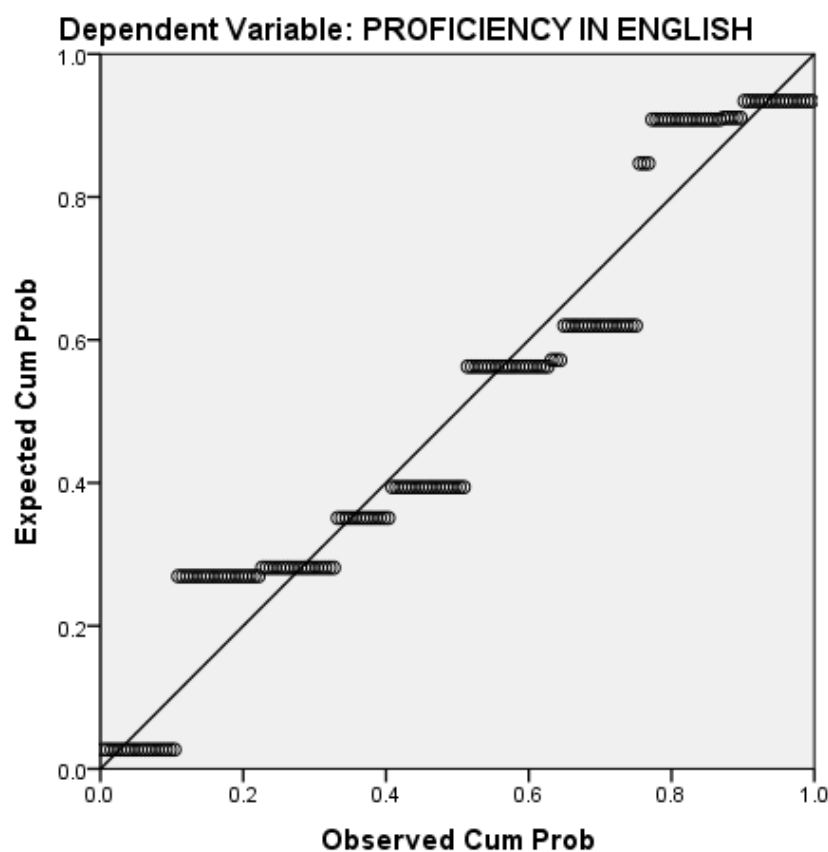


Fig 1: Normal Probability Plot of the Variable under study.

The figure 1, shows how close the observed series (social and linguistic factors) is to proficiency in English. From the analysis it could be seen that the point are closer to the proficiency in English. Hence one will conclude there exist great association.

Table 6: Summarized Data

	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Proficiency in English	167	234	183	96	680
Linguistic Factors	268	199	111	102	680
Social Factors	168	170	257	85	680
TOATL	603	603	551	283	2040

Discussion on Findings

The results show that social and linguistic environments are very significant to proficiency in English. Conducive social and linguistic environments improve proficiency in English. The study is consistent with Addisu (2020) who indicates that social factors such as peer groups and learners' parents affect the learning of English as a foreign language positively. Also, Saad & Yunus (2015) have revealed that three environmental factors that assist in the English language learning are situations, people and media. Therefore, conducive environmental factors promote the learning of English language. The present study relates to Amin and Karfa study in 2021. Amin and Karfa (2021) believe that the development of English as a foreign language is a product of contextual factors. These authors reiterate that the linguistic nature of the community affect English as a foreign language students' academic achievement positively.

Furthermore, the study is similar to that of Kovacs (2011) who states that social environmental factors have an influence on learners' cognitive and effective attitudes to learning English. Therefore, the author affirms that learners' cognitive attitude formation and learners' micro-environment are significant in learning English and the affective attitude of friends plays an important role in learners' cognitive dispositions. In the same vein, the study is consistent with that of Amin (2018) who reveals that students of educated family members are more exposed to the use of the English language since they learn the language from their everyday activities. Quasin and Sibtain (2019) who in a survey on influence of social background in English language proficiency at the secondary level have discovered that challenges in learning English can be overcome by an encouraging social environment that would make the students use English.

Conclusion

Social and linguistic factors play a crucial role in proficiency in the English language at the secondary school level. These factors improve proficiency. Frequent use of the English language among peers, in the classroom and outside the classroom improves proficiency in English. The social and linguistic environments are strong catalysts for proficiency in English. Students who are exposed to the use of English in social situations improve their proficiency. Thus, proficiency in English is critical to student's cognitive formation.

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