

Students' Personality Traits and Performance Correlates of High Grades in Senior School Certificate English in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a report on a study which examined students' personality traits and performance correlates of high grades in senior school certificate English. This is an attempt to correlate students' personality traits, performance in other subjects and high grades in SSCE with particular reference to motivation, attitude, aptitude and extroversion levels. Students' personality attribute questionnaire (SPAQ) was designed by the researcher to enable him assess respondents' views on personality traits. A purposive sample of 346 students with high grades in English was drawn from the target population of 1,800 students from the three Senatorial Districts of Kwara State. The major findings include (a) students' personality traits in relation to the learning of English was rather low; (b) there was a positive but low significant relationship between each of the traits and high grades in SSCE; (c) there was a positive and high significant relationship between performance in each of other subjects and high grades in senior school certificate English (HGSSCE), with Art subjects indicating the highest correlation. The paper recommends, among other suggestions that teachers of English should co-operate with teachers of other subjects while they in turn assume the role of English teachers indirectly, Education policy makers would need to focus attention on the concept of English across the curriculum.

Keywords: Personality traits; Performance correlates; High grades; Senior school certificate English; Kwara State

I. Introduction

English language is a powerful medium of communication in Nigeria. It is the only language Nigerians across linguistic boundaries employ for effective communication, it is a unifying factor among Nigerians, it is the language of government and also a pre-requisite for employment in government. English, apart from being made a compulsory subject in Nigerian schools, it is the sole medium of instruction, and at the tertiary level, a credit pass in Senior School Examination in English language is a necessity for admission into the University (Ayowale 2004 and Aboyeji 2005). English language has become an almighty subject, a subject that makes students get the jitters. But unfortunately, out of all the subjects in the Senior School Curriculum, it is only English that records the most woeful and heart-rendering outcome in public conducted examinations.

This dismal performance in English language according to Adesanoye (1973), Tomori,(1987) and Adegbite (1996) in their various studies in English have shown that performance of students in English language is fast deteriorating owing largely to some personality factors. These scholars further posited that the students' poor performance in English seems to give a reasonable justification for the deteriorating standard of education in

general since all the subjects in the school curriculum (except other languages and to some extent Arabic studies) from the upper primary school to the university are taught and learnt through the medium of English. Gardner and Macintyre (1993) submitted that personality traits such as attitude, motivation, aptitude, extroversion, gender and general learning style if not properly guided could lead to poor performance in second language learning.

Therefore, in making academic achievement a worthwhile exercise, students must be motivated to learn, develop in them positive attitude and high aptitude towards the learning of English language by the teachers.

1.1 Background Literature on Personality Traits and Performance in English

English is the official language of communication, commerce and of course, administration. Also, the life-wire of Nigerian educational system lies on English language because students' ability to undertake higher education in any discipline depends largely on the students' achievement in English language through effective reading so that students can gain mastery of the various subjects of the school curriculum. According to Bhambe (1992), good language learners must develop positive attitude towards English. Similarly, Oxford (1989) posited that increased motivation, high aptitude and self - esteem lead students to more effective use of appropriate strategies in the learning of English language. In a related vein, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) were of the opinion that learning language strategies are intentional on the part of the learners, and that the teaching goal is to affect the learner's motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organises or integrates new knowledge. Similarly, Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried (1998) assert that some factors inherent in students such as motivation, attitude, aptitude and extroversion/ introversion if are on the positive side would assist students' academically.

Furthermore, effective second and foreign language learners use a variety of appropriate meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies for both receptive and productive tasks, the less effective students do not only use strategies less frequently, but have a smaller repertoire of strategies and often do not choose appropriate strategies for the task. Garden (1985) claimed that the higher the achievement, proficiency and ability in a language, the more favourable the attitude. Entwistle and Entwistle (1970) submitted that academic success could be as a result of low extroversion, although one would ordinarily expect high extroversion to be a strong facilitator of language learning. This means that low extroversion level is not a barrier to high performance in English, given the fact that oral fluency was not part of SSC Examination. In another development, Lawal (1985) agreed that although, no specific characteristics result in a good language learner, certain learning strategies can be identified which are frequently associated with good language learning experiences of the learners such as adopting personal style or positive learning strategies that fit their needs and preferences; taking an active approach to the learning task such as seeking out opportunities to communicate in target language with native speakers whenever possible; and are willing to take risks by accepting their status as "linguistic toddlers" .

Based on these various findings, students' personality traits seem to be fundamental to the act of learning generally and to the leaning of English language in particular since English is the medium of learning other subjects just as Elliot and Church(1997) asserted that learners' achievement at any level of education is greatly determined by achievement motivational, positive attitude and high aptitude. Personality traits are therefore seen as very important since they determine academic success of students in the learning of English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The most noticeable area where English is firmly rooted is in the field of education because it is the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, but despite this, many students still do perform poorly in this subject.

Several studies by scholars such as Gardner and Lambert (1972), Lawal (1989) and Cohen (1990) have been conducted in related area of affective variables and performance in English and in other subjects and have confirmed the poor performance of students in English. However, little or nothing has been done in the area of correlating students' personality traits, performance in other subjects and high grades in senior school certificate English. Part of this gap in research is what this study has attempted to address.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to correlate students' personality traits, performance in other subjects and high grades in Senior School Certificate English (HGSSCE). Specifically, it aimed to determine the general performance level of the students with high grades in English (SWHGE) in Science subjects, Commercial subjects and Art subject; to determine the general motivation level of the SWHGE in learning English language; to determine the general attitude of the SWHGE towards the learning of English language; to determine the general aptitude level of the SWHGE in relation to the learning of English language; and to determine the general extroversion level of the SWHGE in relation to the learning of English language.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the students' motivation and their HGSSCE.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between the students' attitude towards the learning of English and their HGSSCE.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between the students' aptitude and their HGSSCE.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between the students' extroversion level and their HGSSCE.

Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between performance in Science subjects and HGSSCE.

Ho₆: There is no significant relationship between performance in Commercial subjects and HGSSCE.

Ho₇: There is no significant relationship between performance in Art subjects and HGSSCE.

Ho₈: There is no significant interactive relationship among students' personality traits, performance in other subjects and HGSSCE.

II. Methods

This is a descriptive correlational study. The population for this study was all the SS3 students in Kwara State, while a purposive sample of 346 students with high grades in English were drawn from the target population of 1,800 from 3 Senatorial Districts of Kwara North, Kwara South and Kwara Central. The West African Senior School Certificate Examination materials in the target subjects of English, Physics, Chemistry, Commerce, Literature in English, Religions studies and students' personality attribute Questionnaire (SPAQ) were used. The SPAQ was dispensed on the respondents. All the 7 research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation statistics, hypotheses 1-7 were analyzed using Pearson r statistics while Multiple Regression analysis statistic was used to analyze hypothesis 8, all at 0.05 alpha level of significant. To ensure reliability of the instrument, the SPAQ was subjected to test re-test technique using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient, producing 0.64 which is adjudged reliable.

III. Results

The analysis of data collected and results of the study are reported. The analysis is based on the research questions and hypotheses stated in the study. The Mean and Standard Deviation statistics used in answering the

research questions, Pearson r statistic used in analysing hypotheses 1-7 and Multiple Regression statistics were all reflected, followed by summary of the findings.

Table 1. General performance level of the SWHGE

General Performance Level of the SWHGE	Maximum obtained score	Mean score	Standard Deviation	Decision
Science Subjects (N=105)	16	8.98	0.69	Average
Commercial Subjects (N=110)	16	9.68	0.89	Good
Art subjects (N=131)	16	11.53	0.99	Good
General Motivation Level of the SWHGE English language (N=346)	20	7.40	3.31	Low
General Attitude Level of the SWHGE towards Learning of English Language (N=346)	20	9.47	3.88	Negative
General Aptitude Level of the SWHGE in Relation to the Learning of English Language (N=346)	20	7.68	2.44	Low
General Extroversion Level of the SWHGE in the Relation to the Learning of English Language (n=346)	20	8.12	3.47	Low

Table 2. Relationship between the students' high grades in SSCE and their motivation, Attitude, Aptitude and Extroversion

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Calculated r value	Decision
HE Motivation	2.02	0.71	0.210	H ₀₁ Rejected
HE Attitude	7.40	3.31	0.231	H ₀₂ Rejected
HE Aptitude	2.02	0.71	0.221	H ₀₃ Rejected
HE Extroversion	9.47	3.88	0.201	H ₀₄ Rejected

N=346; df= 345; Critical Value: 0.195

Table 3. Relationship between HGSSCE and performance in Science and Commercial Subjects and relationship between HE and Commercial Subjects

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	Critical value	Calculated r value	Decision
H G E Performance in Science subjects	105	9.75	0.48	104	0.195	0.263	H ₀₅ rejected
HGE Performance Commercial subjects	110	9.68	0.89	109	0.195	0.284	H ₀₆ rejected
HE Performance Commercial subjects	131	14.67	0.86	130	0.195	0.298	H ₀₇ Rejected

Table 4. Regression Parameter Analysis of Students' Personality Traits, Performance in Other Subjects and HGSSCE

Source	Unstandardized co-efficient		Standardized co-efficient		Calculated p value
	B	Std. Error	Beta	R	
HGE (constant)	13.171			2.098	.08
Motivation	9.311	5.165	.318	1.803	.07
Attitude	8.036	5.628	.284	1.428	.16
Aptitude	5.617	3.661	.274	1.534	.13
Extroversion	2.678	3.060	.160	0.875	.38
Performance in other subjects	0.913	3.736	.024	0.244	.81

IV. Discussion

The finding showed that the general performance level of the students with high grades in English (SWHGE) in Science subjects was just average. This is in line with the submission of Ayowale (2004) that whenever the results of Senior School Certificate Examination are released, Science subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Agriculture and other Science subjects usually record fairly good results. He stated further that even the traditionally dreaded subject which is Mathematics has in recent times been recording better performance. This result of the study thus seems to negate the findings of Ayowale (2004) but affirms the WASSCE and NECO Chief Examiner's Reports for 2008/2009 results as very poor.

The finding indicated that the SWHGE's performance in Commercial subjects was good. In this, Raji's (2006) opinion looks more relevant when he posits that whenever the results of SSCE are released, some subjects like Accounting, Economics, Commerce and even Art subjects such as Literature in English, Yoruba language and even Religious Studies usually record relatively high grades.

The finding revealed that the general performance level of the SWHGE in Art subjects was good. This finding lends support to Raji's (2006) assertion that whenever the SSCE results are released, some Art and Commercial subjects record relatively high grades. The result of the finding indicated that the general motivation level of the SWHGE was low. This tends to lend credence to Gardner and Macintyre's (1993) assertion that affective variables such as attitude and motivation that are not properly guided would lead to poor performance in second language learning. It was also discovered through the finding the general attitude of the SWHGE towards the learning of English was negative. This finding agrees with the study of Gardner and Macintyre (1993) that affective variables such as attitude, if not properly guided could lead to poor performance in second language learning. Similarly, Peng (2003) and Wang (2003) assert that four anxiety constructs of worry, functionality, speech and communication can develop a positive attitude in students. However, if these anxiety constructs are properly monitored, they could adversely affect learners' attitude towards learning of English language. In a similar vein, result of the finding showed that the general aptitude level of the SWHGE in relation to the learning of English was low. The finding is in agreement with the submission of Gardner and Macintyre (1993) that some factors inherent in students such as low aptitude towards the learning of English can affect students' performance.

The results of the finding on the general extroversion level of the SWHGE in relation to the learning of English was low. This result tends to harmonise with the view of Entwistle and Entwistle (1970) that academic success could be a function of low extroversion, although one would ordinarily expect high extroversion to be a strong facilitator of language learning.

Through the finding, it was also discovered that positive but low significant relationship existed between the students' motivation and their high grades in Senior School Certificate English (HGSSCE) in spite of the earlier finding on the general low motivation level of the students. This confirms Garden and Lambert's (1972) view on affective variables such as motivation and attitudes as factors that contribute to successful language learning. On the relationship students' attitudes and their HGSSCE, results of the finding indicated that a low but positive significant relationship existed between students' attitude and their HGSSCE. This finding connotes Bharambe (1992) that positive attitude facilitates learning especially English which aids better understanding of other subjects in the school curriculum.

On the relationship between students' aptitude and their HGSSCE, the finding also showed that a positive but low significant relationship existed between the students' aptitude and their HGSSCE, in spite of the earlier finding of the generally low aptitude of the students. The finding conforms with the finding of Garden and Lambert (1972) that variables such as aptitude contribute to successful language learning. On the relationship between students' extroversion and their HGSSCE, the finding showed that a positive but low significant

relationship existed between students' extroversion level and their HGSSE, in spite of the earlier finding on the generally low extroversion level of the students. This conforms with the submission of Jung (1960) that individual possesses a desire to be friendly, open to the things happening around him and concerns about others, and as such makes him or her a good and successful language learner.

On relationship between performance in Science subjects and HGSSCE, the finding indicated that a positive and high significant relationship existed between performance in Science subjects and HGSSCE, in spite of the earlier finding on the generally average performance of the students. This finding is in line with the assertion of Adegbite (1996) that students' ability in English language influences their performance in other subjects of the curriculum. On the relationship between performance in Commercial subjects and HGSSCE, the finding indicated that there existed a positive and high significant relationship between performance in Commercial subjects and HGSSCE. This finding seems to connote Ayowale's (2004) position that high performance of students in Commercial subjects likes Accounting, Economics, Commerce and even Mathematics depends on their good performance in English language.

On the relationship between performance in Art subjects and HGSSCE, the result of the finding revealed that there existed a positive and high significant relationship between performance in Art subjects and HGSSCE. This finding tends to support Ayowale (2004) and Aboyeji (2005) that students' performance in Art subjects such as Literature in English, Religious Studies and Yoruba language are influenced by good in English language which is seen as the medium of teaching and learning of other subjects. On the interactive relationship among students' personality traits, performance in other subjects and HGSSCE, the finding once again suggests the critical role of performance in other subjects as well as personality traits in facilitating performance in English at the Senior School Certificate Examination level, while paradoxically high performance in English is also a good determinant in all subjects, including the Arts, Commercials and the Sciences. In addition, other factors such as the mass media, peer group, tone of the school and the teachers' performance in other subjects can as well enhance students' performance in English language apart from motivation, attitude, aptitude and extroversion level of the students which according to Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried (1998) see them as the most inherent factors that affect students' performance academically.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

It was concluded that the levels of the students' motivation, attitude, aptitude and extroversion were rather low. However, the traits correlated positively and significantly with high performance in English at the SSCE level. Furthermore, the students' general performance level in Commercial and Science subjects were good as well as a positive and significantly high interactive relationship among personality traits, performance in other subjects and HGSSCE.

It could be concluded that other factors and variables such as the quality of teachers and their teaching, school tone, peer group influence, language use of friends, the mass media and supportive home environment could have contributed to the students' high performance in SSCE.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers of English should cooperate with teachers of other subjects while teachers of their subjects should assume the role of English teachers indirectly, curriculum developers should focus more attention on the concept of English across the curriculum, teacher educators should emphasize on the use of English in Universities and Colleges of Education so that teacher trainees would attain high proficiency in English to enable them support teachers of English, while education policy makers should intensify effort on continuous teacher development programme to enable all teachers support the concept of English across the curriculum.

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