



Determining the Influence of Students' English Proficiency Level(s) on Participating in Extracurricular Activities

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Abstract

English language plays a key role in many anglophone countries including South Africa. It is regarded as a global language that facilitates mass communication. The level of proficiency in the English language determines students' academic and career success. However, it is noticeable that most of the students' English proficiency is unsatisfactory. The proficiency limitations are more discernible when the students are given a chance to express themselves. Ergo, the need to be proficient in the English language is a prerequisite. As a vast of literature indicate that most of the students are rated below the requirements of the English proficiency and this result in linguistic performance barriers which later inhibits academic and career success. Thus, this study intends to divulge the influence of students' English proficiency level in relation to participating in extracurricular activities. A qualitative descriptive design will undergird the study. The purposively sampled participants will give their reflections based on the interview questions and data will be analysed through thematic content analysis. Thereafter, the recommendations will be suggested based on the findings.

Keywords: *English Proficiency Level(S); Extracurricular Activities; Mathew Effect Perspective*

Introduction

English is regarded as a language of mass communication in many countries including South Africa. In a rainbow nation like South Africa, most of individuals who speak different languages found themselves in one setting whereby English become a means of communication. For example, a Sepedi speaking client and a Venda speaking consultant will communicate through the English language when both have limited knowledge of each other' native language. At the same time, it become a struggle if one or both have limited English proficiency as the language barrier will temper with the meaning and results in miscommunication and poor rendering of service if not inactive involvement. According to Thakura,

Freyb, Chewning (2020), limited language proficiency level result in poor rendering of services. As their study indicates that pharmacy students were struggling to render a good service to patients during their practical due to limited English proficiency. This limitation escalated and affected the students' self-esteem as well; hence they delivered poor service. In other words, language proficiency limitations can inhibit one's participation and performance. Thus, this study aims to divulge the influence of students' English language proficiency level in relation to participating in extracurricular activities. In the context of this study, extracurricular activities include sports, student representative council, educational clubs like debate society, student mentorship, peer education and peer counselling which support students' academic performance.

Matthew Effect Theory

This study adopted the Mathew effect theory that was developed by Merton (1968). The theory ensues from the biblical scripture which denotes that the rich person gets richer, and the poor person gets poorer. This symbolises the disparity in humankind that the one who has more capacity receives more than those who have less capacity. The preliminary focus of the Mathew effect theory was on students' reading differences but later escalated and become pertinent to other educational phenomena. In the preliminary focus, reading, the theory sustains the idea that the adequate readers read frequently and become more eloquent whereas the inadequate readers scarcely engage in reading and become less fortunate in terms of reading skills development. For this reason, the aperture between the good and poor readers become broadened (Perc 2014).

Apropos to this study, the Mathew Effect theory serves as a theoretical lens to help the researchers to determine the influence of students' English proficiency level in relation to participating in extracurricular activities. The theory will assist in terms of determining the students' English proficiency level and how it affects their motivation to consult. In this regard, the theory will serve as a guiding principle to determine the gap between the students with satisfactory English proficiency level and the ones with unsatisfactory English proficiency level in relation to participating in extracurricular activities.

English Proficiency Level as a Source

Several findings reveal that adequate English proficiency level is beneficial to the academic attainment. Rafiu and Nwalo (2016) studied the influence of English proficiency in relation to students' academic performance. The findings reveal that there is a substantial relationship between the English proficiency and academic performance. The students with satisfactory English proficiency appeared to perform well in academia. Thus, the authors recommend that reasonable educational resources for English language should be maintained to enhance the academic performance of the students. This recommendation concurs with Cummins (1981) about the need for extensive exposure of English second language for better English linguistic competence and performance. By virtue of this, the English language should be given more time for better language skills attainment as is the language that is associated with academic progression as well as socio-economic advancement.

Academic success of the students is associated with the English language proficiency. According to Stoffelsma and Spooren's (2017) findings, there is a relationship between academic English proficiency and the academic success. The findings indicate that the academic English reading proficiency of the students became beneficial to their academic success whereby the academic outcomes of the first entering students were pleasing due to their adequate English proficiency level. This denotes that the English proficiency level of the students determines the academic success of the students. For instance, if the students' English proficiency level is satisfactory, they stand a good chance for them to succeed in academic unlike when their English proficiency is unsatisfactory. By virtue of this, the

universities should establish extracurricular activities to embrace the students' English proficiency level for academic success.

Another finding of Geide-Stevenson (2018) reveals the positive correlation between the English proficiency academic performance wherein the students' English proficiency found to be satisfactory and have positive influence on their academic execution. The author further mentions that the English proficiency does not only benefits the students on academic interests but also in terms of socialisation as international students. This implies that the English language is not only a prerequisite for academic success but also for socialisation as the language of mass communication if not a global language.

English Proficiency Level as a Barrier

The English language includes many factors that can affect the process of learning either positively or negatively depending on the nature of the influence. The study of Suryani, Suarnajaya and Pratiwi (2020) on factors inhibiting the students to speak the English language discovered that cognitive and affective factors are the reason for this obstruction. The authors indicate that the cognitive factors such as limited grammar knowledge negatively influences the affective factors such as motivation and self-esteem. For this reason, the students evaded to speak the English language. This insinuates that when the students' English proficiency level is limited, there will be a lesser chance for them to engage in activities that require the English language. Hence, this study investigates the influence of students' proficiency level in relation to extracurricular activities.

McLean, Murdoch-Eaton and Shaban (2013) point out that poor English language proficiency inhibits the students' skills development such as communication, presentation, and data-handling skills. The authors further indicate that the students' limited English proficiency also affects their behaviour in terms of participation, consultations as well as their involvement in extracurricular activities. The students with poor English proficiency turn to be inactive in terms of academic and extracurricular related activities to evade discomfiture. Thus, there is a need to determine the influence of English proficiency level in relation to participating in extracurricular activities.

Islam and Stapa's (2021) findings indicate that the students in Bangladesh universities found to have a limited English proficiency. Inadequate linguistic resources, large classes as well as inappropriate application of pedagogical practices were identified as factors influencing the students' limited English proficiency. This denotes that the students' English proficiency level is influenced by the contextual factors. This is validated by Moleke (2021) who stipulates that students' motivation to acquire the English proficiency is affected by the contextual factors such as teaching methodology.

The Role of Extracurricular Activities

A vast of literature affirm that extracurricular activities play a key role on students' academic progress. According to Kardiansyah and Qodriani (2018), extracurricular activities enhance the students' language proficiency. In the context that the language of communication is English, the extracurricular activities develop the students' English proficiency, for example, the more the students make use of the language the greater chance for them to sharpen their English language skills. These authors further discover that the students who participate in extracurricular activities are more proficient in the English language and their academic performance is satisfactory. Because of these findings, extracurricular activities are considered as an essential alternative measure to enhance students' English proficiency. Thus, it is crucial for the present study to determine the influence of Students' English proficiency level on participating in extracurricular activities.

Zakhir (2019) stipulates that extracurricular activities play a significant role in the academic life. The results indicate that the extracurricular activities help the students to be more fluent in English

language and develop their academic skills. Although the findings discovered that most of the academics do not emphasise the importance of participating in extracurricular activities to the students; however, the results show that these activities are beneficial to teaching and learning the English language as they encourage the students to learn and perform well in their studies. Hence, the idea of students to participate in extracurricular activities must be emphasised at universities as a way of enhancing the students' academic skills.

Another study of Ginosyan, Tuzlukova and Ahmed (2020) found that extracurricular activities have an influence on students' academic life. The authors indicate that the students who engage in extracurricular activities found to be more skilled and active than their peers. These activities provide the students with extra practice through informal learning of which later influences their academic performance in a positive way. Additionally, this does not only influence their academic performance, also enhance their self-esteem, and gives them a motivation to learn and exercise their potential. This implies that the extracurricular activities have a positive influence towards students' cognitive and affective factors such as linguistic knowledge as well as motivation. Hence, it is advisable to encourage the students to participate in extracurricular activities.

Equally, the study of Alnaeem (2021) reveal that extracurricular activities are influential than classroom activities in terms of enhancing students' communication skills. the results show that the students who were participating in extracurricular activities were fluent in English and their communication skills were satisfactory. Thus, the authors stress that extracurricular activities should be mandatory to all students at universities for language development skills and meaningful learning purposes.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to offer detailed information about the influence of Students' English proficiency level on participating in extracurricular activities. This approach gives the researcher the opportunity to give detailed information about the phenomenon being studies; also, to realise the new meaning (Dulock, 1993). The researcher purposively sampled eight second year students under the school of languages and communication to discover and attain detailed knowledge about the influence of English proficiency level in relation to extracurricular activities (Kumar 2014).

The study further selected a Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) to analyse the findings. TCA is an essential analytical method responsible for evaluating the views of the participants, for example, looking at the resemblances and alterations as well as generating the anticipated perceptions. It is a flexible method of analysis which guides the researchers to manage data in a way that will fulfil the intentions of the phenomenon bring studied (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Results and discussion

Eight English students from the school of languages and communication were purposively sampled. The students were asked questions in accordance with the objectives of the study. Below are the generated themes from the students' responses.

Responses Related to English Proficiency

Table 1: English language proficiency

| Participants | do you think you get enough exposure of the English language? Give reason for your answer. | How often do you express yourself in the English language? | Rate your English proficiency level? 0 – 10 rating. | Does your English proficiency level affect your participation in class and extracurricular activities? If yes, in what way? |
|---------------|--|--|---|---|
| Participant 1 | No, because mostly our lessons are not engaging, and I just attend for an hour and go back to my room. | Rarely | 4 | Yes, because sometimes is difficult to express ideas due to language proficiency limitations. |
| Participant 2 | Yes, because I read a lot. | Rarely | 5 | No, because my English is good, but I just do not like to participate at all. |
| Participant 3 | Yes, because we interact in English language in class and during debate activities. | Frequently | 6 | Yes, because it motivates me to participate in both class and extracurricular activities. |
| Participant 4 | No, because our classes are teacher-centred and after class I do not get other chances to speak English. | Rarely | 4 | Yes, because sometimes I am afraid to participate in class due to limited English proficiency. |
| Participant 5 | Yes, I am more exposed because I study English frequently. | Not at all | 5 | I do not participate most of the time. So, I do not think so. |
| Participant 6 | No, because I am afraid to speak in English language. | Rarely | 4 | Yes, because it gives one confidence to be active and speak in front of people. |
| Participant 7 | Since our classes are online, we are no longer getting enough chance for the English language exposure, presentations, and adequate interaction. | Rarely | 4 | It does, because when you are not proficient enough you will not be able to participate in most instances. |
| Participant 8 | Yes, during peer education activities we are advised to communicate in English which gives me enough exposure. | Frequently | 6 | Yes, good English proficiency gives one a motivation to be an active participant. |

The table above display the English proficiency related responses of the participants. The participants were asked to indicate whether they get enough exposure for the English language. Out of eight participants, four of them mention that they do not get enough exposure to English language. Most of them indicate that their lesson is more authoritative; ergo, the level of interaction is limited which denies them with the opportunity to express themselves. The participants further mention that the limited classroom interaction affects their way of expressing themselves in the English language. Hence, they indicate that they rarely express themselves in the English language. The findings concur with Islam and Stapa's (2021) findings which indicate that the English proficiency of the students in Bangladesh universities found to be limited due to inadequate teaching methodology.

The data further reveal that the same participants above were requested to rate their English language proficiency from scale 0 – 10. The participants rate themselves below 5 which signify limited English proficiency. Further, they acknowledge that the English language proficiency affect the level of one's participation either in classroom or during extracurricular activities. The participants continue that they experience lower self-esteem and confidence which inhibits them to engage in participation due to limited English proficiency. This implies that the students' limited English proficiency negatively influence their affective factors as well as their participation in academic related activities of which the findings are in line with the Matthew Effect theory pioneer, Merton (1968) who argued that those who have plenty receive more whereas those who have little they receive little if not none.

Equally, the other four participants from the responses assert that they have privilege to experience enough English language. Two of them state that they get the opportunity through extensive reading while the other two aver that they get enough exposure of the English language through classroom interactions as well as debate and peer education extracurricular activities. The adequate exposure of the English language influenced their English proficiency level whereby two of them rated themselves 5 and the other two 6 of which is a reasonable level as compared to the first four participants. These findings attest with the idea of Cummins (1981) as he argued that extensive exposure of the English language results in satisfactory linguistic competence and performance.

In addition, the participants were further requested to state whether the English language proficiency affect their participation in both classroom and extracurricular activities. The answered in this context vary in views wherein two of them mention that they do not participate in both classroom lessons and the extracurricular activities, yet they still think that their English proficiency level is adequate. Conversely, the remaining two participants assert that good English proficiency level affect their participation in class and during extracurricular activities in a positive way. For instance, the other participant emphasises that their classroom discourse is more progress and encourages interaction; also, their extracurricular activity which is debate sharpen their communication skills through active interaction. As Kardiansyah and Qodriani (2018) assert that extracurricular activities enhance the students' language proficiency.

Responses Related to Extracurricular Activities

Table 2: Extracurricular activities

| Participants | Do you think the extracurricular activities are important for academic and linguistic performance? Give reason for your answer. | Do you participate in extracurricular activities? If yes, mention the activities | Does English language used as a means of communication during extracurricular activities? If yes, how can you rate your participation? 0 – 10 rating. | If the English language is not used as a means of communication, then which language is used and how can you rate your participation? 0 – 10 rating. |
|---------------|---|--|---|--|
| Participant 1 | Yes, because participating in other activities other than the academic ones boost confidence and motivation to learn. | No | I do not participate in extracurricular activities. I rate myself 1 rate. | My friends and I communicate through our home language. I rate myself 10. |
| Participant 2 | I do not think so. I do not participate in any activities, but I perform well during test and exams. | No | I do not participate in any activities. So, I cannot rate myself. | Most of the time I communicate using my native language and I can rate myself 10. |
| Participant 3 | Yes, because they enhance self-esteem and motivation to learn more. | Yes, debate club | Yes, I rate myself 7 | We use English frequently and I rate myself 7. |
| Participant 4 | I do not think so because I have never participated in extracurricular activities. | No | I do not engage in extracurricular activities therefore I cannot rate myself. | Mostly I communicate with my roommate using home language and I rate myself 10. |
| Participant 5 | No, because I have never participated in anything but still, I pass. | No | I do not participate in extracurricular activities. So, I cannot rate myself. | I am introvert, so mostly I am not communicating. |
| Participant 6 | They are. It is just that they are not being emphasised. | No | I do not participate in any activities. | I communicate with my friends in my mother, and I rate myself 10. |
| Participant 7 | Yes, because they sharpen one's communication skills. | No | I cannot rate myself since I do not participate in any activities outside classroom. | Mostly I talk with my roommate, and we use our home language. So, I rate myself 10. |
| Participant 8 | Yes, greater proficiency led to good linguistic and academic performance. | Yes, peer education | Yes, I rate myself 8. | We were advised to use English as a means of communication. I rate myself 8. |

The participants were also asked questions that are related to extracurricular activities. They were requested to give their views about the importance of extracurricular activities in relation to academic and linguistic performance. Out of eight participants, five participants acknowledge the significant role played by the English language proficiency towards their participation in both classroom and extracurricular activities. Their emphasis was that adequate English proficiency sharpen their self-esteem and motivate them to learn and actively engage in academic related activities. Additionally, out of these five participants, only two mentions that they are actively involved in extracurricular activities such as debate club as well as peer education organisation whereas the other three are not actively involved in any extracurricular activities. Although many of the participants mention that they are not actively involved in extracurricular activities; however, they acknowledge that the extracurricular activities can be helpful towards their academic and linguistic performance. As Zakhir (2019) stipulates that extracurricular activities play a key role in the academic life of the students.

The results further show that the same participants above were further asked to rate themselves in relation to their participation through the English language. Only two participants rated themselves, 7 and 8 rating, since the rest of the participants mention that they are not actively involved in any extracurricular activities in that they cannot rate themselves. Moreover, these participants were further requested to rate themselves in terms of the language they frequently use for communication as well as their participation rate. From their responses, three of them mostly communicate with their roommates and friends of which the language of communication is home language, and they rate themselves at 10 rating. Whereas the other two rated themselves based on the English language which is used during their extracurricular activities. The other one is rated 7 and the other 8 rating of which implies a positive English language proficiency. This is in line with Tuzlukova and Ahmed (2020) who found that students who engage in extracurricular activities become more skilled and active than their peers as the activities provide them with extra practice through informal learning of which later influences their academic performance in a positive way.

On the contrary, the remaining three participants claim that extracurricular activities do not play a significant role in academic and linguistic performance. The three participants reason that they are not actively involved in any extracurricular activities, but they still manage to excel in their studies. Two of them indicate that they use their mother language to communicate with their friends and they rate themselves 10 rating. These findings show that these students may be doing well in their studies, but they do not exercise their communication skills as they indicate that they do not communicate through the English language in most cases.

Conclusion

This paper intends to determine the influence of Students' English proficiency level on participating in extracurricular activities. The results show that English proficiency plays a significant role towards the students' affective factors such as motivation. The students who were proficient in the English language were confident enough to participate in extracurricular activities such as debate and other activities that sharpen their academic and linguistic performance. A satisfactory English proficiency sharpened one's confidence and motivate them to learn more through active engagement in activities. Whereas those who were not proficient enough in the English language were not actively involved in any extracurricular activities. Thus, this paper suggests that active involvement in extracurricular activities should be emphasised at universities for the students to sharpen their academic and linguistic performance through informal learning.

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