The Relationship between English Language Proficiency, Academic Achievement and Self-Esteem of Non-Native-English-Speaking Students

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Abstract

The present study aims to find out the relationship between English Language proficiency, self-esteem, and academic achievement of the students in Abu Dhabi University (ADU). The variables were analyzed using 't' test, chi-squire and Pearson's product moment correlation. In addition, Self-rating scale, Self-esteem inventory and Language proficiency tests were used to measure the variables. The data were collected from 200 male and female students from Abu Dhabi University. The study could not find out any positive relationship among the variables. It is also revealed that language fluency (IELTS) has no direct impact on the ADU students' self-esteem scores and academic achievement (GPA).

Keywords: self-esteem, academic achievement, language fluency, personality

1. Introduction

Living in a multicultural society like United Arab Emirates requires people to use English in order to communicate effectively in various social contexts. This has made learning English more significant and has highlighted the role of the instructors in developing students' procedural knowledge rather than the conventions of the language (Canagarajah, 2014). Additionally, lack of fluency in spoken English affects the students' self-esteem as many of those international students encounter difficulties to cope with the new way of life and to integrate in the new culture (Banjong, 2015). Low self-esteem not only affects the students' personal life but may also affect their academic achievements.

In modern days and due to financial problems and education development, some students are unlucky to reach the required goals. The language barrier is considered as a challenge for them, especially in proving themselves and achieving high scores in academic institutions. They might face many problems, such as finding difficulty in understanding subjects, especially scientific ones, for they are concerned with many terms and concepts. They will get tired of having to look up every hard word they hear, and either get discouraged or encouraged to work even harder. In case of obstruction, the grades of these students will eventually incline. Hence, it might become hard for them to face the outside world, and their self-esteem might stay quite low. That is why, the proficiency in the English language is a nightmare to some but to others it might be as easy as breathing. Non-native English speaking students who started their learning career at an early age usually have higher English language proficiency than students who started at a later age. Those who started at a really early age would normally have a very high English language proficiency that could be compared to native-English speaking students.

English language proficiency is the ability of an individual to communicate effectively in English. In today's world, where the medium of instruction in almost every university is English, this is a necessary skill. Thus, almost every institution requires non –native English speaking students to undergo either the TOEFL or IELETS test to assess the level of their English proficiency as students who have difficulty in the English language skills may not function well in academics and communication. Also, students, especially enrolled in scientific and technical courses, need a strong knowledge of English to grasp the underlying concepts. Therefore, English can be a problem for a huge population of non-native English students, especially those who study at international universities.

To be a language proficient, students' should demonstrate not only fluency but accuracy as well, and that can be considered as educational achievement. Non-native English speaking students consider having English language

proficiency as an educational goal, which is the academic achievement. Therefore, they get to feel more confident and more belonging because of their achievement and proficiency, which lead them to be more involved in the society.

Self-esteem is defined as "an attitude of self-acceptance, self-approval, and self-respect" (Corsini, 1999). Rosenberg (1989) also described self-esteem as a positive or negative attitude towards a person's self. He concluded that a person with high self-esteem is "an individual who respects himself and considers himself worthy". Self-respect has also been defined as what the person feels regarding himself or what other people think and feel regarding him. Baumeister (1993) stated that self-esteem is changeable over time due to several life events such as competition, attraction, conformity, causal attribution, helpfulness, achievement, and coping with stressful life events. High self-esteem represents a "healthy" view of the self. People who have a positive self-esteem evaluate themselves in a positive way. Pope et al.(1998) stated in his research that a person with low self-esteem is indeed a person who fears contact with others, rejects himself, and feels no pride in himself as a person. Several factors can affect an adolescent's self-esteem, and they are family environment, society, and academic achievement.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of English language proficiency on university students' academic performance and self-esteem. It also intends to examine whether there is a relatively high correlation between English proficiency, test scores, and academic success as well as proposes to measure the correlation among demographic variables (gender, age, nationality, year of study, medium of school instruction, etc.). The following are summery of some studies done in this area:

Custar (2011), in his study, explored the association between receptive oral language proficiency (listening comprehension) and academic achievement. The sample included 802 high school students who were taken for the study. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between second language listening comprehension ability and academic achievement regression analysis. A positive correlation (r(801) = .42, p ≤ 0.0001) was found in between the two variables. Hence, the research results support the hypothesis that there is a significant positive association between academic achievement and oral language proficiency was indicated.

Another study was conducted by Reyes (2007) among 5,268 students from grade 2 through 6 to identify the factors contributing to the academic achievement of English Language and Learners Score in English language arts. The study information was collected from parents and teachers as well. The findings revealed that lack of English Language development program, time, and trained teachers were important factors that affect the student's language art and academic achievement level.

A study by Al-Hebaish, (2012) studied the relationship between students' self-esteem and their academic performance in the oral presentation course; the results of which showed that there is a positive, noteworthy connection between general self-esteem and academic success. The students who scored high in General Self-Confidence Questionnaire also had high scores in the oral test. The study also recommended language instructors to encourage and improve their students' self-esteem in order to help them improve their oral presentation skills.

Venugopalan (2000) inspected the correlation between personality and academic achievement of non-native English Language learners. The results showed a relative connection between personality and students' proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, on the one hand and the extroversion /introversion variable and ESL subject proficiency, on the other. The study also tested the impact of other variables such as gender, native language, and academic environment on the correlation between the personality and ESL subject proficiency. The findings revealed that it is difficult sometimes to characterize ESL learners as either "extroverted" or "introverted".

Another study by Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassaian (2011) went for examining the relationship between self-confidence and other variables such as age and gender .The study evaluated the speaking skills of the participants and measured their self-esteem, as well .The results demonstrated a remarkable relationship between self-esteem and speaking proficiency. There was also a converse relationship between age and speaking skills. Concerning the relationship between gender and speaking skills, no statistically considerable relationship was found.

2. Hypotheses

There is no significant association between language proficiency and academic achievement of non-native-English- speaking students.

There is no significant relationship between language proficiency and self-esteem of non-native-English-

speaking students.

There is no significant association between language proficiency score based on age, gender, year of study and mother tongue

There is no significant association between self-esteem scores of students based on age, gender, year of study and mother tongue.

There is no significant association between academic achievement of students based on age, gender, year of study and mother tongue.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Abu Dhabi University has a population of 5000 students comprising of both male and female students, and for this study 200 undergraduate students participated. The students were from 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of their college. The age group varied between 18-22, and the majority of the participants were non- native English speakers. Across the sample, the largest percentage of students were from Middle east, and a small percentage from other Asian and African countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Kenya.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

The students were selected using simple random sampling technique. IRB (Institutional Review Board) clearances were received from the Research head before conducting the survey. The researchers collected the survey data used in this study with the full cooperation of college authority. The survey questionnaire was distributed among 15 randomly selected class rooms. From the obtained 276 data only 200 responses were included, since other responses were incomplete.

The Independent variable in this study was English language proficiency and the depended variables were academic achievement and self-esteem.

3.4 Instruments

The following tools were used for the data collection.

- Personal Data Form

Personal Data Form gathered relevant information about the subject such as gender, age, and year of study major subject. This data form also included their GPA to check their academic achievement level and ILS score to know their language proficiency. The students' GPA score ranged from 0 to 4 and ILS score ranged from 1 to 9. The personal data form was administrated first, and the students were asked to fill in their personal data without leaving any information incomplete.

- Self-esteem Questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965)

A standardized instrument of Self-esteem inventory was used to measure the self-esteem of the students. It was a modified version of Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire. It has ten items scale that measures global self-worth and positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is believed to be uni-dimensional. All items were answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The students had to mark the items dealing with their general feelings, which indicated how strongly they agree or disagree with the statements.

3.5 Scoring

The items in this scale are to be rated on four point Likert scale. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored by giving "Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points, "Agree" 3 points, and "Strongly Agree" 4 points. The highest score is 30. If the score is 20 and above, this means high self-esteem, if in-between 15–20, this is Moderate, and 15 and below indicates low self-esteem. The instrument has been shown to have a relatively high validity and reliability in terms of its alpha Coefficient (.93) and its test-retest coefficient (.80). The authors in this study also conducted the Cronbach alpha test for each item of the total sample to make sure that the items were internally consistent. The alpha coefficient obtained was found to be in the satisfactory rate and so the researchers used the same test to measure the self- esteem of the students.

3.6 Procedure

The relevant data for this study were collected during the Spring Semester, 2015. The researchers distributed the questionnaire among 300 students, and the 200 completely filled surveys were further used for analysis. Keeping in mind the objectives of the study and also the nature of the data collected, the statistical tools used in this study

to analyze the data were Chi- squire test, correlation analysis and ANOVA.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Socio demographic background of the sample

Variable	Details	Count	%
Age	18 or under	58	18.2
	19-22	212	66.5
	23-26	43	13.5
	27 or older	6	1.9
Gender	Male	134	42
	Female	185	58
Place of birth	United Arab Emirates	186	58.3
	Other	133	41.7
Life in UAE	Less than 4 years	32	10
	5-10 years	30	9.4
	11-15 years	31	9.7
	16-21 years	82	25.7
	More than 22 years	11	3.4
	All my life	133	41.7
Mother tongue	Arabic	251	78.7
	Urdu	6	1.9
	Hindi	6	1.9
	French	2	0.6
	English	31	9.7
	Greek	2	0.6
	Italian	2	0.6
	Other	19	6
Year of study	First year	120	37.6
	Second year	139	43.6
	Thirds year	36	11.3
	Fourth year	19	6
	Fifth year	5	1.6
GPA	Below 2.00	19	6
	2.00 - 2.99	122	38.2
	3.00 - 3.99	162	50.8
	4	16	5
Self esteem	Low self esteem	35	11
	Moderate self esteem	253	79.3
	High self esteem	31	9.7

To understand the characteristics of sample, descriptive statistics were used. As shown in Table 1, (134) 42%

were male and (185) 58% were female students. 66.5% were under the age group of 19-22, 18.2% were under 18 years and 13.5% were between 23-26 years. Among these students population, 58.3% were UAE nationals and 41.7% were expatriates. From the total sample 41.7% of the students spent all their life in UAE.

Among the student sample 78.7% of the students have Arabic as their mother tongue and 9.7% speak English as their 1st language. Academic year represented in the sample were 37.6% of 1st year students, 43.6%, 11.3 were of 2nd and 3rd year and only 7.6% were of 4th and 5th year.

As per the results shown in the above table, only 6% of the students had a GPA less than 2, 38.2%, had between 2-2.99, while 50.8% had between 3.00-3.99 and only 5% had 4 GPA. In this study, the self-esteem of the participants was analyzed and only 11% had low self-esteem, 79.3% had moderate self-esteem, while 9.7% of the students had high self-esteem.

Table 2. Association between language proficiency with academic achievement and self-esteem of non-native-English-speakers

Comparison of IELTS score based on GPA					
GAP	Mean	SD	N	F	p
Below 2.00	5.6	0.7	19		
2.00-2.99	5.7	0.9	122		
3.00-3.99	6.0	1.0	162	2.51	0.059
4	6.1	0.9	16		

Correlation between IELTS score and self-esteem, r = -0.14*, p = 0.012.

Table 2 further shows the association between language proficiency (IELTS score) and GPA (Academic achievement) was statistically not significant since P > 0.01, means academic achievement is not directly associated with language proficiency. The correlation between language proficiency and self-esteem was analyzed r = -0.14 p = 0.012, which is statistically significant at 0.05 level. The results show that language proficiency and self-esteem were inversely related.

Table 3. Association between language proficiency and selected socio demographic variables

Socio demographic variables		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Age	18 or under	6.1	0.9	58			
	19-22	5.9	1.0	212	F	2.96	0.053
	23 or older	5.6	0.7	49			
Gender	Male	5.8	0.9	134	t	1.2	0.232
	Female	5.9	1.0	185			
Place of Birth	United Arab Emirates	5.8	0.9	186	t	2.37*	0.018
	Other	6.0	1.1	133			
Language	Arabic	5.7	1.0	251			
	English	6.6	0.9	31	F	14.54**	0.000
	Others	6.3	0.8	37			
Year of study	First year	5.8	0.7	120			
	Second year	5.8	1.2	139	F	1.76	0.174
	Above thirds year	6.1	0.9	60			

This study explored the association between language proficiency and socio demographic variables and gender. The results reveal that age (F=2.96, P=0.053) gender (t=1.2, p=0.232) year of study (F=1.76, P=0.174) was not significantly associated with language proficiency, whereas as place of birth (p<0.05) and mother tongue (p<0.01)

were significantly associated with language proficiency at 0.05 and 0.01 level.

Table 4. Association between self-esteem and selected socio demographic variables

Socio demographic variables		Mean	SD	N	Test statistics		p
Age	18 or under	40.0	5.7	58			
	19-22	41.3	6.2	212	F	7.29**	0.001
	23 or older	44.2	4.3	49			
Gender	Male	41.7	5.9	134	t	0.57	0.568
	Female	41.3	6.0	185			
Place of Birth	United Arab Emirates	41.2	6.1	186	t	0.88	0.377
	Other	41.8	5.8	133			
Mother Tongue	Arabic	41.3	6.1	251			
	English	41.7	6.0	31	F	0.56	0.569
	Others	42.4	5.2	37			
Year of study	First year	42.7	5.0	120			
	Second year	40.6	6.8	139	F	4.07*	0.018
	Above thirds year	41.0	5.3	60			

The study also explores the association between self-esteem and other socio demographic variables. It was observed that there was a significant association between the variables of self-esteem, age and year of study. The obtained 'F' value is less than table value of 0.01 and 0.05 level in this analysis, and thus, the hypothesis has been rejected. The results prove that students' age and year of study were significantly associated with self-esteem of students.

The study further examines the association between gender (t=0.57, p=0.568), place of birth (t=0.88, p=0.377), and mother tongue with the variable self-esteem, and these variables were not significantly associated; hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5. Association between academic achievement and other variables

Association Between Academic Achievement and Other Variables							
GPA-Age	18 or under		19-22		22 or older		χ^2	p
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
Below 2.00	3	15.8	10	52.6	6	31.6		
2.00-2.99	9	7.4	86	70.5	27	22.1	26.29**	0
3.00-3.99	42	25.9	106	65.4	14	8.6		
4	4	25	10	62.5	2	12.5		
GPA-Mother Tongue	Arabic		English		Others		χ^2	p
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
Below 2.00	16	84.2	1	5.3	2	10.5		
2.00-2.99	98	80.3	13	10.7	11	9	4.59	0.598
3.00-3.99	127	78.4	15	9.3	20	12.3		
4	10	62.5	2	12.5	4	25		
GPA-Year of Study	First year		Second Year		Above Third Year		χ^2	p
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
Below 2.00	6	31.6	13	68.4	0	0	15.85*	0.015

2.00-2.99	36	29.5	62	50.8	24	19.7		
3.00-3.99	69	42.6	59	36.4	34	21		
4	9	56.3	5	31.3	2	12.5		
GPA-Gender	Male		Female		χ^2	p		
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent				
Below 2.00	15	78.9	4	21.1				
2.00-2.99	65	53.3	57	46.7	26.96**	0		
3.00-3.99	49	30.2	113	69.8				
4	5	31.3	11	68.8				
GPA-Place of Birth	UAE		Others		χ^2	p		
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent				
Below 2.00	11	57.9	g	42.1				
2.00-2.99	81	66.4	41	33.6	6.09	0.107		
3.00-3.99	87	53.7	75	46.3				
4	7	43.8	9	56.3				

Analysis was done to determine whether the GPA (academic achievement) is associated with the variable age, gender, and year of study. The results reveal that GPA (academic achievement) was significantly associated with age ($p<0.01$), gender ($p<0.01$) and year of study ($p<0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Other variables such as place of birth ($x^2=6.09$, $p=0.107$), mother tongue ($x^2=4.59$, $p=0.598$) were not significantly associated with the variable academic achievement, and the null hypothesis is accepted.

5. Discussion

Various factors affect the socio-cultural and psychological adjustment of international students in the UAE community; especially the role of English language is very evident. The findings of this exploratory study indicate a negative relationship between English Language proficiency and self-esteem. Comparable results reported by Bashosh et al. (2013, p. 2098) revealed that there was no remarkable correlation between shyness, foreign language anxiety and students' readiness to communicate with their proficiency of English language. The results also did not observe any statistically significant association between language proficiency and academic achievement.

This finding was also supported by Krausz et al. (2005, p. 103), who revealed that there is no superior association between students' performance in the Initial required graduate financial accounting class and their TOEFL scores. The study explored that language proficiency was not significantly associated with the variables: age, gender or year of study. A similar study done by Asadifard and Biria (2013, p. 1685) showed that gender had no significant impact on students' self-esteem. However, place of birth and the student's mother tongue were closely associated with language proficiency. Comparing with the UAE nationals, the students from other nationalities have had better English language proficiency. It was also revealed that the students who have English as their 1st language have better IELTS score than students who speak other languages as their mother tongue. The data also indicated the association of self-esteem with other demographic variables. The data indicate that age and year of study was significantly associated with self-esteem. As shown in the table (4.5), the students who are 23 or older have high self-esteem in comparison with other students who are less than 23. It also revealed that 1st year students have high self-esteem compared to 2nd, 3rd and year students, while gender, place of birth and mother tongue has no association with the variable self-esteem.

Finally the study also reveals the association between academic achievement and other variables such as age, gender, place of birth, mother tongue and year of study. The factors like age, gender and year of study are associated with academic achievement (GPA). The results reveal that the students who are aged 18 or below have higher GPA than students who are above 23 and older. Moreover, the comparison of GPA based on their year of study proved that 1st year students scored better GPA than 2nd, 3rd year and above. Similar to the current research, a research done by Pellizzari and Billari (2012), who examined "the differences in academic performance among students of different ages within the same cohorts", pointed out that youngest student

academic performance was better than the oldest students' performance, and they related the factors of this difference to cognitive capabilities and social activities. Likewise, the study revealed that female students had higher GPA and was better in the academic performance compared to their male counterparts. A similar study done by Çetin (2015) indicated that there was no relationship between students' GPA and academic motivation, as students' scores are not always an effective criterion/indicator to determine students' academic achievement.

6. Conclusions

The current study examines the association between academic achievement, language proficiency and self-esteem among university students. It was observed that language proficiency and self-esteem are negatively correlated. The results could not also observe any association between language proficiency, academic achievement and self-esteem. However, many previous studies proved that language proficiency is indirectly associated with academic achievement. Education system in UAE is relatively new and English Language has been integrated to other subjects recently. Students were found not giving much importance in acquiring their English skills, and they did not believe that augmenting English language fluency will enhance their stand in the society. Usually in western and Asian culture, students with language difficulties are usually isolated from others, and this generally leads to psychological frustrations which in turn affect their self-esteem (Al-Hebaish, 2012). However our students are not considering this as an important factor to improve their self-esteem or academic achievements. Current research needs further exploration to understand the multiple factors which affect students' self-esteem and academic achievement. One of the major limitations of this study was that, this study was conducted only among the students at Abu Dhabi University, and therefore the sample should be considered as a minor segment. However, this can be extended to other universities as well.

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