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The Effect on Learning Objectives and Outcomes of Students' Inability to Develop Language Competencies for Appropriate Communication at the Undergraduate Level

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Abstract

The ability to communicate is a skill needed for beneficial learning outcomes. It is likewise needed for functioning in our connected world and spaces. However, undergraduate writing still gives the impression of poor English writing skills and inadequate communication. The paper takes a linguistic ethnography approach to examine the effects of poor English writing skills on the learning objectives and communication of undergraduate students. Using a random sampling of 37 examination scripts of Communication Studies students and their analysis through a revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, the study suggests that poor English writing skills and the inability to communicate are likely among the effects of the inability of undergraduate students to acquire competence at the comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation tasks needed to enable them compose knowledge and meaningful messages as well as to communicate them. The study, therefore, suggests the need for investigating practical steps that can be taken to assist students with poor English writing competencies and skills to access knowledge and be able to produce knowledge in their learning situations, and further still, be able to communicate their knowledge as competently as possible without an overemphasis on grammatical correctness as the goal.

Keywords

learning objectives and outcomes, language competence, knowledge investigation, reception, production and communication

1. Introduction

The aim of this work is to investigate the effect of language incompetence on the learning objectives and outcomes designed for students in tertiary education. Since the learning and usage of English in academic settings is designed for the investigation, reception and communication of knowledge, students are expected to meet specific learning objectives in their usage of language competencies. The inability to acquire the relevant competencies in the learning and usage of English, therefore, is bound to produce effects directly related to the effectiveness or otherwise of the investigation, reception and communication of knowledge (Cummins, 1980, 2008; Wang & Baker, 2004; Zulu, 2005; McGhie, 2007; Maher, 2011; Jayanthi et al., 2014; Crosnoe et al., 2004; Aripin et al., 2008; Farooq et al., 2011). The paper investigates where these effects manifest most, and what consequences they have for achieving both teachers' and students' learning objectives and outcomes. This is to make it possible to identify and to suggest where focus can be most relevant for both teaching and learning of language, especially of English, at the undergraduate level of education, and possibly beyond.

1.1 Background to the Study

English learning within the Ghanaian educational system is by immersion. Consequently, pupils learn English from Kindergarten to the extent that in many schools, as early as in class one, pupils are being drilled on parts of speech. For example, pupils in Class One are asked or given homework to list as many as ten or more nouns that contain the vowels "ai" such as in "laid", "straight", and so on. They are then asked to use those nouns to make simple sentences.

It is to be expected that pupils who have undergone such drilling, and who have regularly experienced such backgrounds in learning parts of speech and sentence construction over several years of pre-university learning would be proficient in the construction of English sentences and use of words by the end of their pre-university studies which spans an average of twelve years. Of course, it cannot be supposed that all students would have had an equal background as described above due to variations in contexts such as rural versus urban schools, public versus private schools, well-endowed versus deprived schools, and others. One fact remains, nevertheless, that all these various contexts have provided years of some kind of training in the construction and use of sentences at each level from the Primary school through the Junior Secondary/High to the Senior Secondary/High School. That amounts to at least twelve years of such education before entry into tertiary education. Moreover, all these various schools and levels of education use the same syllabus for the purposes of public examinations for transition from one level to the other.

The admission requirements for students to the universities are basically the same, being determined by both the National Council for Tertiary Education and the National Accreditation Board; and the admission requirements include at least a minimum pass in English ending at the C grade level at the Senior High School Certificate (WASSCE) level. And so, English grammar and its study pervade each level of pre-university education. In addition, there exist many different types of resources on English grammar in the environment everywhere, from "Everyday English" programmes on radio and

television, to grammar booklets and books sold along the streets and bookshops, and textbooks in schools. And, ordinarily, colleagues, friends, and other persons, including even strangers, correct others' grammar spoken with mistakes and sometimes ridicule mistakes in grammar and the persons who committed them. There exist, therefore, a reasonable claim that English and grammar are everywhere in Ghana, and that pre-university education is immersed in English, for English is also the official language of education.

1.2 The Problem

The experience of poor grammar among university students raises concerns for better learning outcomes, for communication, and for the realization of teaching objectives. Hence, its most negative effect seems to be the blockage of effective teaching and learning, and allied with these, the blockage of communication and transfer of any knowledge obtained inside or outside learning contexts, whether it is acknowledged as a fact or not.

For example, the following three pieces of student work can illuminate the current concern. The first is a sentence from an essay answering a question about a story, written by a student in Level 200:

1). *"He tries to become a man and reffered the Old Timer as a "woman" on his travel his hands and cheeks became numb, having a box of firewoods (matches) and lunch with him which he will serve as dinner to his friends."*

The second citation is in response to a test on writing an application letter, written by a student in Level 100:

2). *"On the 23rd of September 2018, In the newspaper i found your notification that your company needed a professional, skillful, intelligence and hardworking public relation officer (PRO) to manage your company and the closing deadline was 30th September 2018. Therefore i have all those documents or requirement needed."*

The third example is in response to the task of constructing a thesis statement for an essay that was to be written on the significance of Independence day, also from a Level 100 student:

3) *"In the memorable day of sixth (6) march 1967 he Gold Coast, present day Ghana gained its indepence from colonial masters Great Britain, with the major players present, which today we refare to them as the Big Six."*

Apart from the problems with spelling, punctuation, and syntax, the setting of ideas, tone, and co-ordination are lacking in these run on sentences, resulting in lack of clarity or clear thinking in writing.

Obviously, students themselves understand what they want to say and can express it almost eloquently when engaged orally, but cannot express themselves similarly in writing. This raises concerns about what specific identifiable indications generate their difficulties, and how to address them. How can they be helped to translate their oral eloquence to writing?

Ultimately, the problem remains how poor English competencies affect learning objectives and outcomes to such extent that they make the investigation, reception, communication and production of

knowledge a thing beyond such students. How can these skills be developed through the teaching of Literacy skills such as Communicative skills, English writing skills, or any other viable modes and frameworks for inculcating such skills beyond the insistence on grammatical correctness and the mechanics of grammar. What could constitute the basis of the elements of any strategies that can be put together to improve the writing abilities and competencies of such students? In effect, what kind of competencies can most adequately assist the cultivation, scaffolding, and improvement of English writing skills and communicative abilities among undergraduate students?

The study does not seek to propound any theories; it seeks to understand and find a meaningful direction for developing adequate basis for strategies towards appropriate literacy skills for improving undergraduate learning outcomes and the realization of teaching objectives.

1.3 Research Questions

Four main questions arise from the background so far described. They are generated from the problems enunciated above, posing questions which will guide our investigations:

i. How does poor English language competence affect learning and communication?

ii. How do students attempt to establish meaning through their flawed or poor English writing competencies?

iii. How can we examine the effects of poor English and language skills on the learning objectives and outcomes of students in tertiary education?

iv. How can students' learning objectives be structured to emphasize better learning outcomes and thereby enable the possibility of better investigation, reception, production, and communication of knowledge by learners?

1.4 Significance of the Study: Why Is the Question of Language Competence and Learning Objectives and Outcomes Important? What Is at Stake?

The concern of this investigation is important because of what is at stake—students' ability to investigate and construct, receive, produce and communicate knowledge. As pre-university English studies focuses on English proficiency in order to establish and enable the assimilation of the components of language, namely, mainly the mechanics of language competence, consisting of alphabets, syllables, words, grammar, comprehension and essay-writing, it is expected to lay the foundations for the mechanics of language and writing in preparation for the mastery of progressively higher and deeper learning towards the investigation, reception, production and communication of knowledge. On the other hand, in the university or tertiary education where ideas are the prerogative, the need is for how to employ the language competencies acquired previously at the pre-tertiary stage to integrate and frame ideas through language; thus the importance of Literacy skills such as Communicative skills and Academic Writing and other textual models which concern themselves more about the development of integrating and framing ideas and knowledge, including their expression or communication—hence, about investigating, knowing, creating and expressing or communicating. Such an orientation is not just about knowledge as an accumulation of information and the mechanics

of language, but about the ability to think, investigate and understand reality, integrate and construct reality, communicate it, and to mature at the discourse level through its pragmatic usage to effect concrete outcomes. In this argument, we draw mainly upon the implications of The Council of Europe's "Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for Languages" cited by Eva Sandoval (2019) in her article on how to measure language fluency. CEFR outlines six levels of proficiency, represented as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. In these representations, A, corresponds to "Basic levels", B, to "independent", and C, to "Proficient".

Thus, the observable skills under the upper levels of the "independent" scale to the "Proficient" scale accord with the competencies relating to information, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. B2 levels "Can understand the themes of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics and will have achieved a degree of fluency and spontaneity, which makes interaction with native speakers possible without significant strain for either party."

C1 levels "Can understand a wide range of longer texts and recognize subtleties and implicit meaning, producing clear, well-structured and detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational, connectors, and cohesive devices."

C2 levels "Can understand virtually everything heard or read, expressing themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, while differentiating finer shades of meaning even in highly complex situations."

These levels of proficiency orient away from the simple mechanics of grammar and information towards more complex levels of understanding, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of texts and reality. Consequently, university English does not depend primarily upon or concentrate on the ability to remember information, but recognizes that the power to use language increases as comprehension and the use of understanding in reasoning and other related dimensions of it grow. In this wise, English studies in the university strives to help students to construct perspectives and mental models in order to share how they think, act, and feel; that is, to increase and improve their models of reality, reasoning capacities, and emotions, and thereby also influence their attitudes and actions and values or habits of mind and heart (Adjoe, 2011).

However, it is obvious that language learning and gaining competence in language are affected by many factors ranging from age, emotion, interest, need, first language, to teaching methods. Negotiating all these factors pose a grave challenge to language learners. Hence, judging from the numerous studies detailing the inability of students to write English proficiently, it is clear that the problem will persist for a long time as structural, personal, psychological, and sociological problems generating the problems cannot be immediately resolved, if ever they can be. Nonetheless, the question remains how to be able to help or guide students to build the resources needed to access knowledge, as well as able to produce and communicate knowledge in spite of their deficiencies in English writing competencies, while concurrently assisting them to attain proficiency in it at the highest levels. In effect, the study attempts to find a means of understanding how students could be helped to achieve the

learning objectives of education with or without competence in language use, or in the mastery of the mechanics of grammar.

However, to be able to grasp the many challenges affecting the smooth development of competence in language acquisition and its use, our work perceives the value in first reviewing and building upon what others have discussed about how to understand the phenomenon of students' inability to build the optimum competence in language acquisition and usage. We, therefore, examine the various perspectives under which the phenomenon has been studied and summarized.

1.5 Review of the Literature on Language Learning

The logic of our examination of the learning of English at university suggests that university English studies is about achieving the capacity to learn, grow in the ability to receive, investigate, construct, produce and communicate knowledge. Hence how do the learners of a language, particularly, of English feel that English learning promotes their intellectual and personal development?

As a small study, the paper avoids a lengthy discussion of theoretical arguments and debates on the nature of knowledge, teaching, learning and the structure and structuring of pedagogic discourse and discourse of education (Bernstein, 1990), language, power and pedagogy (Cummins, 2000; Fairclough, 2001), reproduction in education (Bourdieu, 1990), planning inequality through language (Tollefson 1991), and second language learning theories (Mitchell & Myles, 1998) and other critical theoretical pursuits. Instead, it focuses its attention on the pragmatic situation of teaching objectives and learning outcomes as they currently exist in the Ghanaian educational system. For this reason, the review of literature is restricted to a general outline of well-rehearsed and generally well-known accounts of the barriers to language acquisition, and can feel normative. Nonetheless, Kembo (2000), provides a somewhat general overview of supposed factors involved in creating barriers for the pursuit of language learning and usage and will be used as a major resource in this regard.

The search for what students should be concerned about in learning to improve upon their English writing competencies, to cultivate their reasoning abilities, and to cultivate the habits of mind that can lead to constant use of those intellectual skills, conducts us to draw upon Kembo (2000) in discussing the main factors affecting language learning in general, and especially in the acquisition of a new language as identified and known by various language scholars. These factors include generally, age, cognition, motivation, and emotion.

In terms of age, Kembo cites Brown (1987) who observes that age invariably results in mental, physical and affective differences. These differences in turn have an effect on "how we think, how our bodies function, and how we feel" (Kembo, 2000, p. 294). These effects are explained further by neurological researches which have determined that maturity of the body produces a corresponding distribution of functions to different parts of the brain. According to this distribution of functions to the brain, control of language is assigned to the left side of the brain. This process is said to be completed by the age of sixteen years. The implication of this process of maturation and distribution of functions over time is that learners cannot easily attain a native-like control of new languages, especially in pronunciation,

especially after the age of sixteen years. “One reason for this could be that, as people grow older, the elasticity of the many muscle groups required to produce certain sounds decreases. Or it may be that these muscle groups become so conditioned to producing sounds in our first language that we find it difficult to retrain them to produce those sounds in the target language that differ from those of the first language” (Kembo, 2000, p. 295).

Besides the conditioning of the muscle groups, the attitudes learners have to other people and the languages they speak also contribute to what we may choose to learn or not, and to what extent we may choose to learn them. In addition to these, the perceptions of ourselves and the risks we are prepared to take or not, regarding whether to be seen making mistakes in speaking or writing a language or not, influence language learning.

Kembo observes that as a result of the above mentioned factors, many learners of English in Africa begin in a disadvantageous position because “In Africa, there are examples of children beginning school at the age of six, eight, or (in extreme circumstances) only at adolescence (after the age of twelve). It is, therefore, likely that one of the obstacles to successful second-language acquisition is the age factor” (Kembo, 20000, p. 295).

But, in language learning, age is only one factor that can possibly influence its acquisition. Cognitive factors also have a role in second language learning. Cognition is about knowledge and the ability to successfully process the knowledge and use it. Scholars like Ausubel, drawn upon by Brown (1987), argue that knowledge is most successfully acquired if what is learned is related to and acquired through experience. This kind of principle can be observed operating in mother-tongue learning. In mother-tongue learning, children use their known and familiar contexts and experience to learn language successfully. In this regard, learning takes the form of communicating about things that are immediately important to the learners. This is an experiential mode, and the results of this experiential mode is that learners’ communication is felt to contribute to what they consider to be important and meaningful through the knowledge they are processing, and to the knowledge itself that they process. The experience of mother tongue learning is, therefore, instructive as it is considered as “an instrument for controlling the environment to serve their needs” (Kembo, 2000, p. 295).

The case of learning a target language is different though. In the case of learning a target language like English in Africa, for instance, the child already has at least one language as a mother tongue; thus he/she is already in possession of a language in which he/she can operate with ease. This does not provide the child with “a strong instrumental incentive” to acquire another language. But a child may want to acquire a language, anyway, in order to gain peer acceptance, such as to “make friends, control her environment, express opinions, and make her feelings known”, or desire to learn how to communicate with the rest of the group. On the other hand, the child can desire to reproduce a mother tongue experience of language for a target language like English, but may limit this to contexts that require him/her to make his/her wishes and needs known in English and the mother tongue. In doing so, a child will be learning language only because it is situated in meaningful situations, and aimed at

acting on the learner's environment and getting its needs met. This type of language learning differs from learning language in the classroom. In the classroom, there is hardly any meaningful situation or reason to communicate in the target language; it is therefore abstract.

This draws attention to the influence of the goals and motivation for a person who decides to learn or feels the need for another language. A child learning another language may only vaguely be aware of the reasons for trying to acquire another language and the motivations which are the driving force behind his/her desire to learn a target language. However, often, it is due to the need "for acceptance and a desire to take part in the activities of those around her". Unlike an adult learner, the child will often be so focused on acquiring a target language that he/she will learn the language in a very short time. The reasons for this brevity of time is the amount of effort he/she is able to dedicate to the learning, the amount of exposure to the new language, and the fact that at this stage the learner has formed very few rigid opinions and prejudices about groups and other languages which might have inhibited their learning of another language. For such a child, what is central is that he/she will be learning a new language in order to meet real needs. Such a child's learning is goal-oriented (Kembo, 2000).

Adults, on the other hand, have different reasons for learning a target language although it also depends largely on the "situatedness" of the desire to learn the new language. They may be learning a new language because they are working in a job where they will need to use it. In other words, in Africa, because of the increasing movement of people from one country to another, adults may learn other languages for more conscious reasons rather than spontaneously. Nevertheless, although they may be learning another language, they are not likely to focus intensely on learning it as children do because they may have other responsibilities to attend to. But above all,

"because of their proficiency in at least one language and their intellectual development, they may tend to over-analyse the language data that they encounter, using their first language for points of comparison even where there are no similarities. Adults are more aware of the differences between their own languages and the new language, and this awareness, together with the effort involved, may discourage many from learning a foreign language. This may in turn result in slower learning, or eventual inadequate mastery of the target language. Adults may thus bring more knowledge of the world to the learning situation than a child learner, but they also have various handicaps" (Kembo, 2000, p. 296).

Besides these, affective factors also play a role in language acquisition, especially in second language acquisition. As human beings are not only "thinking beings" but also "feeling beings", how learners feel may also influence why a person learns a language more successfully than another. It is noted that in learning language, children are less self-conscious and more spontaneous learners than adults. This characteristic of language learning seems more important and applicable for target-language learning than to mother tongue learning. In this domain, it can be noted that the affective *"includes personality factors, such as our image of ourselves: are we secure and confident, or insecure and shy? Do we feel*

threatened? Are we outgoing or inward-looking? Inhibited? Anxious? Do we have a positive attitude, or do we have negative prejudices about the target language or the learning situation? Someone who has self-confidence is more likely to take the risk of making mistakes. Similarly, a friendly person is more likely to have input from friends and acquaintances, as well as more opportunities to speak the target language. While a shy person may not want to risk making errors, the extrovert's concern will be to forge relationships. A negative person might be surrounded by input in the target language, but their attitude blocks it from becoming part of their knowledge. This is an interesting area of language learning, both because of its pervasive nature and because for a long time it has not been taken seriously in language teaching and learning." (Kembo, 2000, p. 297).

Among all these factors, the "willingness to make a fool of oneself" is an essential ingredient in a language learning process; and it is something young children are able to do because they are not self-conscious. However, as they grow older, self-consciousness becomes a major factor and of importance, especially to adolescents. Adolescents develop shyness because it is a period in which they try to forge new identities, and so too become self-doubting and self protective of their self-image to which a new language and its learning involving the readiness to make a fool of oneself could pose a threat.

Other factors influencing language learning are substrate. This refers to the role that the languages already acquired by a learner of a new language plays in learning. Scholars have identified such substrate influences as "interlanguage", negative transfer, and "intralingual transfer".

Language teaching methods also play an important role in the learning of new languages, and are important for this research, but will not directly belong within the scope of this specific work.

Thus, it is obvious that language learning and gaining competence in language is affected by many factors ranging from age, emotion, interest, need, first language, and teaching methods. Negotiating all these factors poses a grave challenge to language learners. Furthermore, in the words of Hosker (2002, p. 112) in describing the contribution of factors to a resultant effect and accounting for such effects: "In reality, it is often difficult to pinpoint one causal association. This is because human, physical, and psychological make-up, social circumstances, and opportunities have profound effects on the way each individual views, interprets and reacts to the world. As a result, several or many variables often interact with each other and influence the observed relationship between two variables."

Hence, judging from the numerous studies detailing the possible reasons for inability of students to write English proficiently, it is clear that the problem will persist for a long time as structural, personal, psychological, and sociological problems generating the problems cannot be immediately resolved. Nonetheless, the question remains how to be able to help students access knowledge as well as be able to produce and communicate knowledge in spite of their deficiencies in English writing while at the same time assisting them to attain proficiency in it. In effect, the study will attempt to help to find ways of assisting students to achieve the learning objectives of education.

2. Method

In order to understand the phenomenon of student inability to use English competently through the correct construction of sentences and use of words and self- expression, it is important to be able to determine and define the problem and its nature more precisely through previous literature on the subject. This enabled us also to identify its characteristics and the co-ordinates supporting the creation of incompetence in the use of language. Besides, that also enabled us to be able to suggest modes of prevention of the problem. To ensure this, we, from a position of insiders, undertook an investigation of the problem through a mixed or multiple mode of study, but adopting especially the use of linguistic ethnography which includes the study of pieces of students' work as well as using previous literature related to our line of investigation. We found this approach a suitable one because the research deals with language and its use in context, particularly as it is used by students in particular academic situations and scenarios that require the investigation, reception and communication of knowledge, and at the end, the achievement of learning objectives. Following this approach, we selected a sample of 37 students from a class of 125 Level 200 Communication students on a Second Semester Social Studies Course in a Private University who were informed of the purposes of the research in advance. The sample was drawn from the examination scripts of the students, selecting every third script in order to obtain randomness in the selection. We then settled on a particular essay question that was to be compulsorily answered by all students because of its general nature. The examination domain gave us a context in which students utilized their language competence in a specific academic task measured by specific time schedules. The answers of the students to the specific question were coded according to five main categories and concepts under comprehension, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and Errors in English use/grammatical errors. The data were then analyzed according to frequency and percentage terms to enable description and elaboration.

3. Sample Data and Description

Using Benjamin Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives in their revised form as worked by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and cited by Susan Ambrose et al (2010), which represent six levels of intellectual behaviour including simple recall of facts to the creation of new knowledge, we constructed categories for our investigation. However, we concerned ourselves with the grids describing levels of intellectual behaviour from comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. We added a fifth grid describing the degree and types of errors committed in English usage. We were particular that we should be able to discern how students are able to successfully represent or code their knowledge in order to communicate them to their audiences. The examination context provides an ideal situation in which to be able to capture the knowledge obtained and produced by students, how they are able to represent them, and how they are able to communicate them to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning objectives and outcomes designed by their teachers.

Comprehension involves understanding, suggesting that a student has a grasp of the facts about the

content under examination, and has the ability to establish the relationship between the facts in order to make meaning of an event, situation, or content.

Analysis relates to the detailed examination and apprehension of the elements and components of a message and its structure, and the ability to figure out why it has been so designed. *Synthesis* indicates the ability of the student to employ a combination of the components of content, data or structure as understood to establish new possibilities such as to form a recognizable new framework in connected whole. *Evaluation* dwells upon the ability of a student to make independent judgements about the amount, number, or value of the content, data or message at hand. And *errors in English Usage or grammatical errors* recorded all kinds of errors in grammar such as spelling mistakes, wrong syntax, wrong word use, fragments, ambiguities and others.

Each of these levels of intellectual behaviour were in turn each assessed upon four criteria including *excellent*, *competent*, *not yet competent*, and *poor*, following Susan Ambrose et al's (2010) methods of analysis of student intellectual behaviours. "Excellent" registered clarity such that sentences are concise, well crafted, and vocabulary use precise to the extent that the reader can discern the student's communication from the writing without effort. "Competent" represents clarity to the extent that the reader can discern the meaning of the student's communication with very little effort. "Not yet competent" indicated that the reader cannot always discern meaning from the student's communication; and "poor" points to the fact that the reader cannot discern meaning from the student's communication as a whole.

Based on a question: "Compare and contrast the two main economic systems in operation in the world today, proposing which could be more suited for our modern world", the categories and measures outlined above were applied. The results indicated the following:

Comprehension: 62% of students had no introduction to their essays, and meaning could not be discerned from their work. In effect, their communication of knowledge was poor. Their writing showed no structure, and no clarity or depth of understanding of the topic. 38% had introductions, but these introductions showed a poor understanding of the topic and its content, hence meaning could not be easily discerned from their writing. In effect, they showed that they are not yet competent in both structuring and communicating their knowledge.

Analysis: 32% stated only facts or points without any detailed examination of the subject, let alone establishing any kind of relationship between the facts in order to design knowledge or motif. They were poor. 46% attempted to establish relationships among facts of some sort but failed because they either focused on only one point or were incoherent, or lacked focus, or created an incoherent piece of writing which was difficult to decipher to know what they were driving at. They were not yet competent. Only 8% gave fairly good analysis of points and established a relationship in a fairly satisfactory way to create a framework of near coherent message that could be understood and appreciated. They could be described as competent.

Synthesis: 46% made no attempt at establishing relationships and connections between the facts, or

establish a synthesis of facts into any kind of argument. They were poor. 43% attempted a synthesis but these were very weak or lacked focus, or were too shallow to be meaningful. They could be described as not yet competent. 11% had fairly good synthesis of material and introduced recognizable arguments. They can be described as competent.

Evaluation: 27% had nothing that showed an evaluation in their work at all, making no independent judgments about the subject under discussion. They are poor. 62% attempted evaluations, but they were either evaluations that had no basis upon which their positions were taken, or were based upon positions taken on wrong premises, or did so on bases that were confusing. These are not yet competent. 11% had evaluations that were good and well-grounded on the premises of the subject under discussion and the arguments they initiated through synthesis. They are competent.

Errors in English Use or Grammatical Errors: Out of the 37 students, only one student had a script whose English use was generally good. The rest of the 36 students, constituting 97.2%, had all kinds of grammatical errors. All the students, except one (2.8%), were poor in grammatical use of language and in language competence in general.

4. Discussion of Results: Implications for Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The high number of students who did poorly or who were not yet competent in all categories is surprising, exceeding our expectations, as we had assumed that although complaints about the language competence of students were rampant, it pertained to only a small number that were circulating in the system from course to course, and from level to level of progression through the academic years. The study has, on the other hand, projected a scenario of language incompetence that affects learning resulting from a lack of competence in five key areas of language learning and acquisition targets as well as required for academic competence in education in the manner that Bloom (1956), Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), and Ambrose, Susan et al. (2010) pointed out: namely, information, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Thus, learning objectives and outcomes can neither be readily nor satisfactorily achieved by students lacking in these crucial factors of educational achievement. It means, that in order to improve upon the educational achievement of students in this environment, a different emphasis has to be sought—an emphasis on structuring teaching to achieve comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, and if possible, creativity.

It must be noted that the student who scored “Competent” in English proficiency or in grammatical usage did not perform competently in all the other categories. Instead, under the category of comprehension, the student had no introduction and structure to the beginning of the writing and showed an incomplete grasp of the content of the question. Under the category of analysis, he/she merely listed points without making any detailed examination of the subject or make any connections between the content he/she was relating to in order to create an understanding of what he/she wanted to explain. Synthesis, not surprisingly, was lacking because he/she could not explain and link components of his/her discussion to others. Consequently, being unable to show that he/she had a grasp of the

content of the question and to create a structure for its discussion in the introduction, he/she was unable to explain the components of the question and how they are related to one another to create a recognizable whole. Unable to show competence in any of these categories, he/she was unable to employ the understanding and insight gained from the other categories to enable an independent judgement on the topic. His/her attempted evaluation failed. This finding suggests that putting undue emphasis on English proficiency or grammatical proficiency does not guarantee better academic performance either.

From the results, it is also established that the problem of Errors in English usage will remain a fixed feature most of the time, suggesting that the problem of errors in English usage cannot be readily eradicated; the same cannot be said for the other categories. Instead, it is expected that all the other categories in our distribution will vary most of the time. In effect, in any case of interventions, results will be more likely achieved if emphasis is placed upon them than if emphasis is placed upon the elimination or eradication of errors in English usage. Thus, more fruitful work can be done and achieved in helping students towards learning how to comprehend, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate rather than emphasizing or cultivating an obsession towards achieving a purity and proficiency in grammatical usage and the mechanics of language teaching. We may even dare to suggest that proficiency in the other categories may raise the interest in students to strive to gain proficiency also in grammar. A starting point would be to be intentional in making the learning objectives of comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation critical in our English teaching courses and highlight them in the course outlines and subsequently, in the course evaluations.

An interest in cultivating and achieving proficiency in the English grammar and the mechanics of usage may arise instead as a gradual raising of consciousness when the student, in acquiring various progressive advancements in comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, (B2, C1, C2) recognizes that they may need a proficiency in grammar and the mechanics of writing to be able to achieve accomplishment, or to be able to reach their full potential as they climb the ladder of job achievement, public service, academic achievement, or their other life-course achievements.

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this small-scale research, in terms of the inability of students to connect facts to comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, points ultimately to the contribution of teachers' and instructors' role in knowledge investigation, reception, production and communication. In the words of Ambrose et al. (2010, p. 13), "Students do not come into our courses as blank slates, but rather with knowledge gained in other courses and through daily life. This knowledge consists of an amalgam of facts, beliefs, values and attitudes, some of which are accurate, complete, and appropriate for the context, some of which are inaccurate, insufficient for the learning requirements of the course, or simply inappropriate for the context. As students bring this knowledge to bear in our classrooms, it influences how they filter and interpret incoming information."

It is to be understood, therefore, that students generally build upon a prior foundation of language

acquisition and competence. If it is a robust foundation by the extent to which it is structured, it will enable a student to forge links or make relevant connections through comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This could, in turn, more likely than not, help them to construct increasingly complex and robust knowledge structures spontaneously. If, on the other hand, their study of language did not build such structures and were based on an obsessive concentration on correctness in grammatical construction and the mechanics of language, they cannot spontaneously adopt them or employ them for the investigation, reception, production and communication of knowledge because they will be lacking in the skills that enable comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation that teachers and instructors omitted to consciously cultivate.

The above observations suggest that the real task is for teachers in teaching language acquisition and competence to formulate the knowledge structures of facts, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation that can enable students construct and appropriate knowledge. It means that teachers and instructors need re-orientation in how to structure their language teaching according to the knowledge structures corresponding to an information, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation mould that can enable students learn how to forge links and connections for appropriate contexts and communication.

Consequently, individual teachers and instructors in the languages and communication courses would have to be re-oriented in how to make it their specific task and target to build the knowledge structures of the students they teach simultaneously or progressively with emphasis on the components identified for achieving learning objectives and outcomes.

The possible drawback on following these procedures, however, is that much responsibility rests with the teachers or instructors; and some teachers or instructors may find it difficult to depart from the traditional ways of perceiving language teaching and communication as solely the teaching and elimination of error in students' speaking and writing such that they have become passionately welded to English Proficiency as the mechanics of language acquisition and its accuracy, which is perhaps punctuated with a sprinkling of comprehension and summary exercises.

Another outcome of this research is the suggestion that given the background of long acquaintance with the study of English and grammar in the educational system, it cannot be expected that if students are still unable to write good sentences or grammar and express themselves in it, they would be able to obtain the competence they were unable to achieve at the lower levels of education within a year or so of university merely through one or two Semesters of a two hour credit course in English Proficiency. This is so because students do not usually consider English Proficiency as relevant to the context of their core technical courses or studies. Instead, only a purposefully targeted scheme of remedial English courses mounted specifically for students who are identified as lacking in the required levels of competence in English grammar can be enrolled in may produce effective results. Such conscious and self-accepting moves could motivate and prompt students with such need to make self-conscious efforts to improve upon their English grammatical competence for academic work. This is because the high

percentage of students with various grammatical errors in writing suggests that most previous studies of English have been affected by many variables, including the fact that students may have been studying English, not mainly with the aim for academic achievement, but mainly for interaction and acceptance into a community of speakers of English for its benefits of interaction rather than for academic achievement. But, first of all, a remedial unit needs to be established in tertiary institutions to meet such an objective of learning the languages for academic work and for communication in academic contexts.

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