

***Factors Contributing to Quality Performance in a Foundation English Course at a Higher Educational Institution***

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**Abstract**

The knowledge of English language is important for the educational, economical, and national development of a country where the official language is English. There is a growing concern about undergraduates' quality in performance in the English language course at the States' University. The objective of the study is to examine the factors contributing to quality performance in the foundation English course, ENG 1105: Introduction to the use of English at a State University in Guyana. The scope of this quantitative study involved both English majors and non-English majors, across the population. The population consisted of 254 registered students. Through the process of simple random sampling 20% was selected. Responses from the 80 participants showed that lecturers' pedagogy, attitudes of learners and learning preferences, were factors that influenced performance in this course. The findings and conclusions indicate that the three factors: Lecturers' pedagogy, undergraduates' attitudes toward their learning and particular learning preferences significantly influence their performance and therefore, performance in English language as a subject may be improved. It is recommended that more lecturers attend professional development sessions to enhance their pedagogical skills. Lecturers should encourage and create situations where learners can develop positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning process. Implications include having lecturers use different pedagogical skills and incorporate various student activities both curricular and non-curricular activities which may stimulate students' interest towards learning, and may help undergraduates to improve their English language and comprehension skills.

Keywords: Students' Performance, Lecturers' Pedagogy, Learning Preference, Social Factor

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## Introduction

The course, Introduction to the use of English is a foundation mandatory course, required for all students who enter this state University in the faculty of Education and Humanities. The ENG 1105 course introduces students to English language as it is used in academic settings, targets the development of reading and writing skills, and aims to provide interactive settings for students. (See appendix 4). Further, this course aims to develop and increase students' language awareness, and mastery of oral and written Standard English. The criteria for pursuing the ENG 1105 course can be optional. Candidates can either have at least a grade 1-3 in English A at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) or the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). Persons with a trained certificate from the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) can also register for this course or candidates not possessing those 3 requirements, can complete the University's Entrance Examination (UGEE).

## Background to the Problem

Globally, the main objective of education in any democratic society is to provide learners with a quality education that enlightens them to be productive members of society (Kundu & Tutoo, 2000). With globalization, the English language being a form of communication is seen as important worldwide, and learners must perform well to assist in both economical and national development.

A study done by Malik et al. (2016) indicated that the academic performance of students has a direct impact on the socio-economic development of a country. Therefore, the development of any nation or community depends largely on the quality of educational opportunities available to its human resources.

Lecturers have expressed concerns about the poor performance in English A as a core subject. They were concerned about the poor writing, grammar, and comprehension skills that are often displayed by students in the completion of assignments. These qualities were also demonstrated in their final examinations, both written and oral presentations not only in the foundation ENG 1105 course, but in other courses in their field of study.

In addition, there were concerns about the admission level. Even though students have excelled at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) or Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), (Grades A or I), they perform below the passing grade of C in the ENG 1105 course (table 1).

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Good Performance A-C</b>	<b>Poor Performance D-F</b>
2016/2017	199	105 (53%)	94 (47%)
2017/2018	184	76 (41 %)	108 (59 %)
2018/2019	260	101 (38 %)	159 (62%)

Table 1. Performance of students in ENG 1105 at the campus over a three-year period 2016/2017 to 2018/2019

There was a pattern of more students obtaining grades D-F rather than good performance within the range of grades A-C over three years. Also, an examination of the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) English 'A' results and the CSEC Report on the performance of English in Guyana for the past three years (2017 to 2019), indicate an improvement in performance in this area. However, despite this "slight" improvement, some students are still underperforming in other English courses.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were constructed to gather data on factors influencing performance in the ENG 1105 course at the University.

- To what extent is the lecturers' pedagogy a contributing factor to the quality of performance in ENG 1105?
- To what extent are undergraduates' attitudes toward learning responsible for their performance?
- To what extent do learning preferences have on the performance in the ENG 1105 course?

## **Methodology/Population**

Participants in this study consisted of 20% of the 254 students registered for the course, ENG 1105. The participants were all registered students at a campus of this state University. The respondents in this study were 19% male and 81% female. There were two participants with ages ranging from 16-25 years, twenty-six between 26-35 years, forty-five between 36-45 years and, seven between the range 45 years and above.

The quantitative design was used and the simple random sampling methodology was done. In addition, the LIKERT scale Questionnaire-LIKERT scale -(LIKERT Scale type). (1- Strongly disagree (SD), 2- disagree (D), 3-agree (A) and 4 strongly agree (SA) was used to obtain data for this study

## **Literature Review**

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

The Reciprocal Teaching Method and the Experiential Learning Theory (learning styles model) were used as the theoretical framework for this study. Kolb's theory showed that experiential learning could be applied to any subject matter. It encourages learners to play an active role in the learning process to build knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes via direct experience. Experiential learning activities have shown to increase learners' knowledge and grades, and improve their attitudes towards challenging materials (Kolb, 1984). Studies in support of the experiential learning theory found that by incorporating this theory in higher education settings, there were improvements in academic performance (Reitmeier, 2000).

Reciprocal teaching is an approach that teach learners to become responsible for their reading and employ metacognitive reading strategies over cognitive reading strategies (Cohen, 1998). It is also seen as an educational teaching /learning strategy that helps efficient readers to improve their reading comprehension skills and become independent readers.

According to Kotti (2008), experiential learning refers to the organization of the learning process based on the pedagogical principle of “learning by doing”, which indicates that learners acquire knowledge after an experience or change in events.

## 1.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a model that employs the use of drawings/diagrams to explain the interrelationships between variables (Orodho, 2009). It helps to identify and clarify what you know and value as central aspects of a study and then connect these with the various other aspects of influences on research.

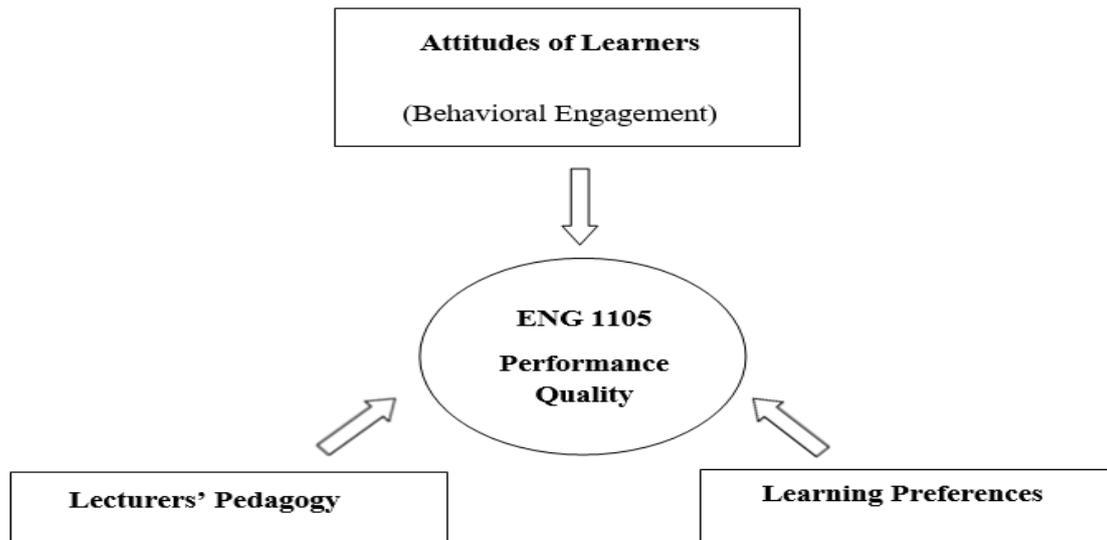


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Consisting of Variables That Guided the Research

The conceptual framework indicates how the factors will influence performance quality in ENG 1105, Introduction to the use of English. The model shows the relationship between the different variables and performance quality in the course ENG 1105.

Further, the diagram shows that performance quality as a dependent variable is related to the variables; the lecturer’s pedagogy, learning preferences, and attitudes of learners.

## Summary of Literature Review

The issue of performance in the English language is seen as a researchable topic that has caught the attention of many researchers. Studies have indicated some possible factors that have contributed to the performance of learners at the higher education level and more so, the University Level in many English and non-English speaking territories. The literature provided pieces of work that showed teacher pedagogy and experience, learners’ attitudes towards learning, and subject matter as contributors to the quality of performance. A study done by Beijaard and De Vries (2008) indicated that the teacher’s beliefs and their pedagogical knowledge about teaching and learning are closely connected and to some extent, both pedagogical and subject matter impacts the teaching and learning process. In addition, other researchers have advocated that most teachers teach according to how they have first learned (Stitt-Gohdes, 2001).

As a result of the different ideologies of researchers, the researcher believes that lecturers' pedagogy can impact student performance both negatively and positively, and as such, there is no "one" or "best" approach to curriculum delivery at the university level. The literature also argued that learners' attitudes and engagement are factors that can contribute to quality performance. In support of this statement, Fishman & Cooper (1974) argued that language attitude must include aspects such as an individual's attitude towards the use of language and an equally important attitude towards language as a subject. On the contrary, Mullins (2015) noted that a negative attitude toward learning could result in learners performing poorly preventing them from obtaining the required results for university entrance. This comprehensive review of literature has highlighted learners' interests and learning preferences as influencing factors in the quality of performance in English language courses. Research done by Heller et al. (2003) noted that the extent to which students' interests are incorporated is significantly related to their academic achievement and that the inclusion of students' interests in the learning process increases student engagement in the learning process and therefore, positive student engagement can positively impact student achievement. Generally, the literature presented empirical research findings and suggestions that can impact and influence the quality of student performance both positively and negatively, as such, the researcher will pursue this research to determine factors influencing performance in ENG 1105 at a state University in Guyana.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

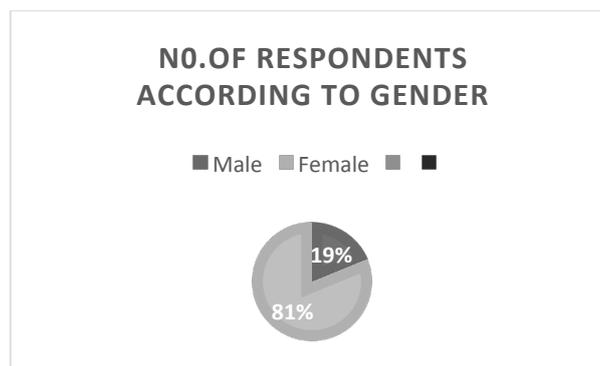


Figure 2: The Percentage Breakdown of the Participants According to Their Gender

From the 80 participants, 15 were male and 65 females. This indicates that a significant number of participants were females.

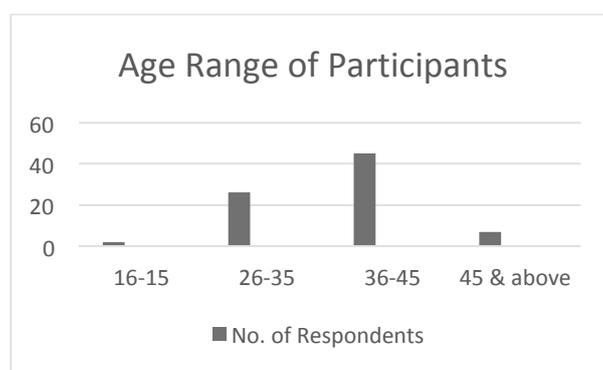


Figure 3: An Analysis of the Age Range of Participants

There were two participants with ages ranging from 16-25 years, twenty-six between 26-35 years, forty-five between 36-45 years and, seven between the range of 45 years and above. This clearly shows that there is a significant number of respondents ranging between 36-45 years and above.

<b>Faculty/Division of Study</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Agriculture & Forestry	3
Education & Humanities	46
Natural Sciences	5
Social Sciences	26
School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI)	0

Table 2. The number of participants according to their faculty area of study

There were three respondents from the division of Agriculture and Forestry, forty-six from Education and Humanities, five from Natural Sciences, and twenty-six from Social Sciences. The table indicates that a significant number of participants from both the faculty of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences were randomly selected for this study.

<b>Year of Study</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>34</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>46</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>0</b>
4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>0</b>

Table 3. The year of study for all participants in this study

A total of 34 participants were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study while 46 were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. There were no participants in their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years because the course ENG 1105, is offered in the first year of the semester for all other university students at the Campus except for students from the Faculty of Education & Humanities who are required to complete this course in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

Items	SD		D		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.The lecture method is the main method used throughout the ENG1105 course.	12	15	15	19	32	40	21	26
2.Probing is one teaching method used by my lecturer to assist students with learning difficulties	47	59	21	26	9	11	3	4
3.The lecturer for ENG1105 conducts him/herself in a professional manner	15	19	5	6	59	74	1	1
4.My ENG1105 lecturer always provide feedback on completed assignments	12	15	17	21	48	60	3	4
5. There is a balanced between learning activities and course content for ENG1105.	7	9	57	71	14	17	2	3

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses to the Cluster of Items Related to Research Question One

Items	SD		D		A		SA	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
1.I am responsible for my own learning in the ENG 1105 course.	6	8	33	41	40	50	1	1
2.I do not feel enthusiastic to attend my ENG1105 class sessions	6	8	20	25	37	46	17	21
3.My dislike for English A at secondary school translates into my English course at UG	17	21	22	28	32	40	9	11
4.I am always actively engaged in the tutorial sessions of ENG1105	40	50	18	23	12	15	10	12
5.Group work creates a motivating environment to learning and succeeding in English language	18	22	55	69	6	8	1	1

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses to the Cluster of Items Related to Research Question Two

Items	SD		D		A		SA	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
1.I prefer to work independently rather than with my colleagues	9	11	14	17	31	39	26	33
2.Oral presentation is always a challenge for me during the ENG1105 course	0	0	0	0	7	9	73	91
3.I learn best by reading handouts rather than having the lecturer dictate to the class	8	10	4	5	62	77	6	8
4.I enjoy working in small groups	0	0	0	0	8	10	72	90
5.I explore and complete thorough research on English assignments given by my lecturer	7	9	9	11	53	66	11	14

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses to the Cluster of Items Related to Research Question Three

### Analysis of Results

Q 1-Data in the table revealed that 66% of the respondents agreed that the lecture method is the main method used throughout the ENG 1105 course while 14% disagreed. For item 2: Probing is one teaching method used by my lecturer to assist students with learning difficulties, 85% of the students were disagreed with this item compared with 15 % who agreed. Responses to item 3 revealed that 75% of the respondents agreed that the lecturer for the ENG 1105 course conducted him/herself in a professional manner during lectures while 25 % felt this is not so. For item 4, 64% of the respondents claimed that lecturers of ENG 1105 always provided feedbacks on completed assignment compared with 36% claimed that they were not in agreement with the item. Interestingly, 80% of the students indicated that there was no balance between learning activities and course content for ENG 1105.

Q 2-Responses to item 3 in this cluster revealed that 49% of the students said that the dislike for English A at secondary school moved with them in English courses at the university compared with 51% who disagree. Additionally, for item 4, 73% of the respondents disagreed that they were actively involved in tutorial sessions in the ENG 1105 course. Further, 91% of the participants disagreed that group work creates a motivating environment to learning and succeeding in ENG 1105.

Q 3- Data in the table shows that 72% of the respondents agreed that they preferred to work independently rather than with colleagues compared with 28% who disagreed with the item. Responses to item 2 in this cluster revealed that 100% of the students indicated that oral presentations always challenged them during the ENG 1105 course. For item 3, 85% of the respondents indicated that they learn best by reading handouts rather than having the lecturer dictate to the class compared with 15% who disagreed with the item. Responses for item 4 indicated that 100% of the students were in agreement that working in small groups was enjoyable.

## **Findings from the data collection procedure**

- Lecturers' pedagogy had an impact on students' performance.
- lecturers using the most effective pedagogy will capture the attention of the students in the ENG 1105 class.
- Lecturers need to use more creative teaching techniques in this course that will stimulate the students' interest and motivate them to learn English. On the other hand, if the teacher does not have excellent pedagogical skills to competently teach ENG 1105 then the students will continue to fail the subject.
- Attitude- undergraduates' attitude towards learning is responsible for their quality of performance.
- students need to be self-motivated. However, if they portray negative attitudes towards the subject, this can be an obstacle towards learning.
- The preferred learning style had an impact on the performance in the ENG 1105 course. Lecturers must know their learners in terms of their learning preference and plan accordingly.
- Lecturers must plan for audio learners, visual learners, the audio-visual learners, the spatial learners and should also possess the ability to influence the students in having a personalized process of learning and ensuring that students are familiar with the English culture.

## **Conclusions**

The study concluded that lecturers' pedagogy was the main influencing factor in performance level at the State University. Findings indicate that lecturers who use more creative teaching techniques in this course will stimulate students' interest and motivate them to learn. Further, lecturers who use the most effective pedagogy will capture the attention of the students in the ENG 1105 class.

Attitudes of students towards their learning were found to have an impact on academic performance. The findings indicate a positive significant relationship between students' attitudes and performance in the ENG1105 course. Further, if students have positive attitudes toward ENG 1105 at the State University, they will persuade themselves to learn it at all costs. In addition, the findings show that lecturers must be cognizant of the preferences in learning of their students. Learning preferences should be accommodated by activities tailored to meet students' needs. Therefore, ENG 1105 lecturers must plan for audio, visual, audio-visual, and spatial learners to influence students in having a personalized process of teaching and learning.

In general, the research study led to the conclusion that performance in English would greatly be enhanced through improvements on the three influencing factors examined in this study. Lecturers' pedagogy, learning preferences, and attitudes of learners were the factors influencing performance in the ENG 1105 course at the State University. Recommendations and implications seek to address improvements in these areas.

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