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ABSTRACT

The English Language Education serves as the primary medium of instruction and a key determinant of academic mobility in Nigeria. Despite its central role, students in Akwa Ibom State consistently exhibit underperformance in national examinations, indicating deficiencies in the mastery of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Although systemic factors are frequently identified as contributing to this challenge, the influence of individual study behaviors remains insufficiently explored. This study investigates the influence of study habits—specifically time management, note-taking, regular practice, and active reading—on the holistic mastery of English language skills among senior secondary school students. The primary objectives are to examine the effects of these study habits and to explore whether gender moderates these relationships. Guided by a quantitative research framework, the study posits that effective self-regulated study habits significantly predict linguistic competence. The null hypotheses tested include: (H_{01}) no significant influence of time management; (H_{02}) no significant influence of note-taking and organization; (H_{03}) no significant influence of regular practice and reinforcement; and (H_{04}) gender does not moderate the relationship between study habits and English mastery. The findings are expected to inform pedagogical strategies and curriculum design by shifting attention from mere classroom instruction to the cultivation of autonomous learning behaviors essential for language acquisition in multilingual contexts.

KEYWORDS: Study Habits, English Language Mastery, Academic Performance, Senior Secondary Students, Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

The English Language Education functions not merely as a subject within the Nigerian educational curriculum but as the principal medium of instruction and a major determinant of academic and professional mobility. As Nigeria's official language and a global lingua franca, proficiency in English is essential for students to meet the cognitive and communicative demands of senior secondary education (West African Examinations Council [WAEC], 2022). Mastery of the language—through listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills—is closely associated with academic achievement because English serves as the medium through which knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and communicated across school subjects (Adebayo, 2022). Consequently, competence in English language remains fundamental to students' participation in academic discourse, comprehension of complex texts, and effective communication within broader social and educational contexts. Despite the centrality of English language education in Nigeria, students' performance in public examinations has remained persistently unsatisfactory, particularly in Akwa Ibom State. Reports from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) continue to reveal weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, essay writing, and oral expression

among secondary school students (Udoh & Umoh, 2020; Essien, 2018). This persistent underperformance raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing approaches to language learning and instruction. While previous studies have largely attributed poor performance to systemic factors such as inadequate instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, and teacher-related challenges, comparatively limited attention has been given to the role of students' individual learning behaviors and self-regulated study practices in promoting language mastery. Within multilingual educational contexts such as Akwa Ibom State, the challenge of mastering English language becomes even more complex, as many students navigate linguistic interference from indigenous languages including Ibibio, Annang, and Efik while simultaneously attempting to acquire proficiency in English language structures and usage (Bashir & Mattoo, 2022). In such contexts, effective study habits become critical to successful language acquisition. Study habits refer to the consistent and strategic learning behaviors adopted by students to improve understanding, retention, and academic performance, and these include time management, note-taking and organization, regular practice and revision, and active reading engagement. Effective study habits support self-regulated learning by enabling students to move beyond passive exposure to active participation in the learning process. Empirical literature suggests that study habits significantly influence students' academic outcomes across disciplines, as effective time management promotes structured learning and enhances retention through repeated exposure to concepts and vocabulary, while organized note-taking facilitates comprehension and recall. In the same vein, regular practice reinforces grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and communicative competence, and active reading strategies such as annotation, questioning, summarizing, and connecting textual information to prior knowledge further enhance comprehension and critical thinking abilities (Hartwig & Dunlosky, 2022). Collectively, these study behaviors contribute to the development of linguistic competence and communicative proficiency necessary for effective English language mastery. English language mastery extends beyond basic communication skills to include the ability to interpret, analyze, and produce language appropriately across academic and social contexts, encompassing grammatical competence, communicative competence, and cognitive academic language proficiency (Nation, 2021). Achieving this level of proficiency requires sustained learner engagement and deliberate practice; however, many secondary school students continue to rely on ineffective learning approaches such as rote memorization and examination-oriented cramming, which often result in fragmented understanding and weak communicative ability. Gender differences in study habits and language achievement have also attracted scholarly attention, with studies indicating that female students frequently demonstrate more organized and consistent study routines, whereas male students may exhibit preferences for interactive or technology-mediated learning approaches (Yusuf, 2019; Ehrman & Oxford, 2018). Although these studies provide valuable insights, existing literature has focused largely on general academic achievement rather than the holistic mastery of English language skills, and limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining how specific dimensions of study habits influence listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills simultaneously within multilingual contexts such as Akwa Ibom State. Despite growing research on academic performance and learning strategies, there remains a paucity of empirical studies investigating the extent to which specific study habits predict comprehensive English language mastery among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Previous studies have predominantly concentrated on general academic achievement without adequately addressing the integrated development of language competencies or the moderating influence of gender, thereby creating the need for a more focused investigation into how students' self-regulated learning behaviors contribute to English language proficiency.

Therefore, this study investigates the influence of study habits—specifically time management, note-taking and organization, regular practice and reinforcement, and active reading engagement—on the mastery of English language skills among Senior Secondary School

Two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, while also examining whether gender moderates the relationship between study habits and English language mastery. By exploring these variables, the study seeks to contribute to existing scholarship on language acquisition and provide evidence-based insights for improving English language learning outcomes in multilingual educational settings.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the impact of specific study habits on the mastery of English language skills among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. To achieve this, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the influence of time management on students' mastery of English language skills.
2. Determine the effect of note-taking and organizational habits on students' English language proficiency.
3. Assess how regular practice and reinforcement contribute to students' mastery of English language skills.
4. Explore whether gender moderates the relationship between study habits and English language mastery.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives, the following null hypotheses are formulated and will be tested:

- **H₁**: There is no significant influence of time management on students' mastery of English language skills.
- **H₂**: Note-taking and organizational habits do not significantly influence students' mastery of English language skills.
- **H₃**: Regular practice and reinforcement do not significantly influence students' mastery of English language skills.
- **H₄**: Gender does not moderate the relationship between study habits and English language mastery.

Literature Review

The conceptual framework of this study pivots on the intersection of specific study habits and the mastery of the four core English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Study habits are conceptualized not merely as routine study schedules, but as strategic, goal-oriented cognitive behaviors including time management, note-taking, regular practice, and active reading (Crede & Kuncel, 2023). These habits are critical in multilingual contexts like Akwa Ibom State, where students must navigate the linguistic interference of indigenous languages such as Ibibio, Annang, and Efik while acquiring academic English.

Time management and organization constitute the foundational bedrock of effective study. Research indicates that students who systematically allocate time for distinct language tasks—such as vocabulary drills and reading comprehension—demonstrate significantly higher proficiency gains than those relying on ad hoc approaches (MacCann et al., 2020). In the Akwa Ibom context, where infrastructural constraints exist, effective time management serves as an equity strategy, allowing students to maximize limited resources through focused engagement (Udo, 2022). Complementing this is the role of note-taking and organization. Systematic note-taking transforms passive learning into active cognitive processing; the Cornell method, for

instance, has been shown to reinforce linguistic patterns through metacognitive reprocessing, significantly aiding the retention of complex syntax and vocabulary (Kiewra, 2021; Rahmani & Sadeghi, 2021).

Furthermore, the concept of regular practice and enforcement is pivotal for language automatization. Language acquisition relies heavily on the consistency of exposure and rehearsal. Students who adhere to disciplined practice schedules, reinforced by accountability mechanisms like peer monitoring or digital tracking, show superior mastery of English skills compared to those with irregular patterns (Nation, 2020; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2021). This enforcement is crucial in overcoming the "intermediate plateau" often seen in second language acquisition.

Active reading engagement represents a sophisticated dimension of these habits. Moving beyond lexical decoding, active reading involves interacting with texts through annotation, questioning, and connecting ideas to prior knowledge. This practice is essential for developing advanced literacy skills, particularly in navigating the complex academic texts required for examinations like WAEC and NECO (Adesina, 2022; Duke et al., 2021).

The mastery of specific language skills is inextricably linked to these habits. Listening comprehension, a complex cognitive skill involving real-time processing, is enhanced by disciplined listening routines and distraction-free environments (Uko-Abasi & Ekpenyong, 2022). Speaking fluency requires not just practice but the reduction of cognitive load through the automatization of language structures, a process facilitated by consistent communicative practice and exposure to authentic language models (Segalowitz, 2019; Derwing & Munro, 2021). Writing proficiency demands organizational competence and rhetorical awareness, where habits such as journaling, outlining, and error logging are vital for overcoming L1 interference (Udosen, 2022; Bamgbose, 2023). Similarly, reading comprehension is strengthened by metacognitive strategies that allow students to monitor their understanding and employ fix-up strategies when meaning breaks down (Goldman et al., 2022).

These learning processes do not occur in a vacuum. The study environment—encompassing physical infrastructure, resource availability, and psychosocial support—plays a determinant role (Akinboye, 2021). Additionally, gender has been identified as a significant variable, with evidence suggesting distinct engagement patterns where female students often excel in organized, detail-oriented tasks like writing, while male students may prefer interactive, technology-mediated approaches (Ezeike, 2021; Yusuf, 2019).

This study is anchored in three theoretical perspectives: Constructivist Theory, Behaviourist Theory, and Cognitive Theory. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how study habits influence language acquisition. Constructivist Theory, advanced by Piaget and Vygotsky, posits that learning is an active process of knowledge construction rather than passive reception. The theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). In the context of English mastery, constructivism suggests that students learn best when they actively engage with the language through authentic tasks and social collaboration (Brooks, 2022). For Akwa Ibom students, this implies that study habits involving peer discussion, collaborative problem-solving, and connecting new linguistic concepts to existing indigenous knowledge (scaffolding) are more effective than rote memorization. It frames the learner as an active meaning-maker, validating the use of prior linguistic and cultural experiences as resources for acquiring English (Cummins, 2021).

Behaviourist Theory, rooted in the works of Skinner and Watson, explains learning through observable behaviors and environmental conditioning. It emphasizes the role of reinforcement, punishment, and habit formation. From this perspective, English language mastery is developed through the systematic practice of correct language forms and immediate feedback (Smith, 2021). Behaviourism underpins the efficacy of drills, spaced repetition, and positive reinforcement—study habits that are particularly effective for developing grammatical accuracy and automaticity in vocabulary recall. It supports the notion that consistent, repetitive study behaviors, reinforced by academic success or teacher feedback, shape the student's linguistic proficiency over time (Williams, 2023).

Cognitive Theory focuses on the internal mental processes involved in learning, such as memory, information processing, and metacognition. Theorists like Ausubel and Bruner highlight the importance of meaningful learning and schema building. Cognitive theory suggests that effective study habits optimize the brain's information processing capabilities. Strategies such as retrieval practice, elaborative interrogation, and chunking help manage cognitive load and facilitate the transfer of information from working to long-term memory (Miller, 2021). In this study, cognitive theory explains why students who employ metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning—achieve deeper language mastery than those who rely on superficial study techniques (Flavell, 2023).

Empirical research globally and within Nigeria has consistently highlighted the correlation between study habits and academic achievement, particularly in language learning. Eze, Uzoechina, and Onyeka (2021), in a study of Nigerian secondary students, established a strong positive correlation between specific study habits—time management and note-taking—and English performance, identifying these as the strongest predictors of success. This aligns with the findings of Okafor and Ezeh (2022) in Anambra State, who reinforced that effective time management directly impacts achievement in reading and writing components.

Focusing specifically on the Akwa Ibom context, Umoren and Etudor (2022) investigated collaborative learning strategies in Uyo Metropolis. Their findings demonstrated that structured collaborative habits significantly enhanced speaking and writing competence, suggesting that social dimensions of studying are critical in the region. However, while these studies confirm the importance of habits, they often isolate specific skills or regions.

Internationally, Li and Wang (2023) in China provided evidence on the synergy between digital tools and self-regulated learning, finding that technology enhances vocabulary acquisition only when coupled with disciplined study habits. Similarly, Kaya and Demir (2022) in Turkey emphasized the longitudinal impact of goal setting and self-assessment on EFL proficiency, reinforcing the cognitive theory tenets of metacognition.

Despite these findings, a critical gap remains. Existing literature, such as the work of Sari and Putra (2020) on journaling in Indonesia or Patel and Rao (2021) on parental involvement in India, often focuses on isolated interventions (single skills) or general academic performance. Few studies have assessed the holistic influence of integrated study habits on all four English language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—simultaneously. Furthermore, gender-specific dynamics in study habit formation within the unique multilingual environment of Akwa Ibom State remain under-explored (Khan et al., 2020).

The literature reviewed establishes a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for this study. Conceptually, study habits—encompassing time management, note-taking, active reading, and regular practice—are validated as critical determinants of English language mastery.

Theoretically, the integration of Constructivist, Behaviourist, and Cognitive perspectives offers a holistic view: Constructivism explains the social and active nature of learning; Behaviourism accounts for the habit formation and reinforcement necessary for drilling mechanics; and Cognitive Theory addresses the mental processing and metacognitive strategies required for deep comprehension.

Empirical evidence from scholars such as Eze et al. (2021), Umoren and Etudor (2022), and Okafor and Ezech (2022) corroborates the positive relationship between these behaviors and language outcomes. However, the review reveals a significant gap. Previous research has predominantly examined study habits in relation to general English performance or focused narrowly on individual skills like reading or writing. There is a paucity of research specifically examining how a composite of study habits influences the holistic mastery of all four language skills among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the predictive power of study habits on comprehensive English proficiency, while also considering the moderating role of gender, thereby providing targeted insights for educators and policymakers in the region.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to systematically collect and analyze data on the influence of study habits on the mastery of English language skills among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The chapter presents the research design, area of study, population, sample and sampling techniques, instrumentation, validation and reliability of the instruments, administration procedures, and methods of data analysis.

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data from a large sample of respondents in order to describe and explain the existing relationship between study habits and English language mastery without manipulating any variables. The design is suitable for this study as it enables the measurement of students' study habits and English language performance in their natural educational settings while also allowing for the examination of associated variables such as gender and learning environment.

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state comprises 31 Local Government Areas grouped into three senatorial districts: Uyo (Akwa Ibom North-East), Ikot Ekpene (Akwa Ibom North-West), and Eket (Akwa Ibom South). Akwa Ibom shares boundaries with Cross River, Abia, and Rivers States, and extends to the Atlantic coastline. It is characterized by cultural diversity, with major ethnic groups including Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Eket, and Ibeno. The state also has a strong educational infrastructure, with a large number of public secondary schools distributed across rural and urban areas. Despite these developments, challenges persist in student academic performance, particularly in English language acquisition, making it a suitable context for this study.

The population for this study comprised 68,523 Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students enrolled in 279 public secondary schools across the three educational zones of Akwa Ibom State—Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket—with respective population distributions of 25,768; 23,026; and 19,729 students, as obtained from the State Ministry of Education. Using Taro Yamané's formula for sample size determination, a sample size of 398 students was calculated. However, a total of 394 completed questionnaires were retrieved and deemed usable for analysis, representing a response rate of 99%.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select participants. In the first stage, 20% of Local Government Areas (LGAs) from each senatorial district were selected through simple random sampling, resulting in a total of 10 LGAs. In the second stage, one public secondary school was randomly chosen from each selected LGA. In the final stage, SS2 students from intact classes within these schools were sampled to participate in the study.

The data collection instruments comprised a structured Study Habits Questionnaire (SHQ) and an English Language Mastery Test (ELMT). The SHQ was divided into two sections: Section A gathered demographic information, while Section B assessed students' study habits across four key domains— time management, note-taking and organization, regular practice and reinforcement, and active reading engagement. The SHQ consisted of 20 items rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The ELMT consisted of 20 multiple-choice items designed to evaluate students' mastery of English language skills, with each item scored out of five marks, resulting in a total possible score of 100.

Content and face validity of the instruments were established through expert review by three lecturers in Educational Foundations and Measurement and Evaluation at Abia State University. The experts evaluated the instruments in terms of clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Their recommendations led to modifications in item structure, wording, and format to ensure clarity and appropriateness for the target respondents.

The reliability of the instruments was established through a pilot test conducted on students outside the sampled population. Data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency. The reliability coefficients for the SHQ and ELMT were 0.73 and 0.71 respectively, indicating acceptable levels of reliability for research purposes.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of three trained research assistants. Prior to administration, the assistants were briefed on ethical considerations and standardized procedures to ensure consistency in data collection. The instruments were administered during school hours in coordination with school authorities to enhance participation and improve response rates.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

This section presents the results of the data analysis based on the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. Descriptive statistics comprising mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. What is the influence of time management on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the influence of time management on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Time Management	N	X̄	SD
Students' Mastery of English Language Skills	Excellent Mastery	42	60.57	15.28
	Good Mastery	130	57.38	11.61
	Fair Mastery	145	46.52	9.32
	Poor Mastery	77	34.16	14.56

Table.1 shows that students with excellent mastery of English language skills recorded the highest mean score in time management, while students with poor mastery recorded the lowest mean score. The result indicates a positive relationship between effective time management and students' mastery of English language skills.

1. What is the influence of note-taking and organization on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the influence of note-taking and organization on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Note-Taking/Organization	N	X̄	SD
Students' Mastery of English Language Skills	Excellent Mastery	66	61.75	12.17
	Good Mastery	126	56.94	8.92
	Fair Mastery	134	44.97	10.31
	Poor Mastery	68	34.97	11.05

Table .2 indicates that students with higher levels of English language mastery demonstrated higher mean scores in note-taking and organization. This suggests that effective note-taking and organizational habits positively influence students' mastery of English language skills.

2. What is the influence of regular practice and reinforcement on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table .3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the influence of regular practice and reinforcement on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Regular Practice/Reinforcement	N	X	SD
Students' Mastery of English Language Skills	Excellent Mastery	61	62.70	12.74
	Good Mastery	122	58.48	9.12
	Fair Mastery	129	42.61	8.37
	Poor Mastery	82	34.85	11.07

Table 3 reveals that students with excellent mastery recorded the highest mean score in regular practice and reinforcement, whereas students with poor mastery recorded the lowest mean score. The finding suggests that regular practice and reinforcement contribute significantly to improved English language mastery.

Result of Analysis

3. Time management has no significant influence on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Result of Analysis of Variance of the influence of time management on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	Sig.
Between Groups	25996.364	3	8665.455	35.461	2.60	.000b
Within Groups	95302.431	390	244.365			
Total	121298.794	393				

Significant at $P < .05$ alpha level; $N = 394$.

Table 4. shows that the calculated F-value of 35.461 exceeded the critical F-value of 2.60 at $p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that time management significantly influences students' mastery of English language skills.

4. Note-taking and organization have no significant influence on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5: Result of Analysis of Variance of the influence of note-taking and organization on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal
Between Groups	21486.240	3	7162.080	27.984
Within Groups	99812.554	390	255.929	

Significant at $P < .05$ alpha level; $N = 394$.

The result in Table. 5 indicates that note-taking and organization significantly influenced students' mastery of English language skills, $F(3,390) = 27.984$, $p < .05$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

5. Regular practice and reinforcement have no significant influence on senior secondary school students' mastery of English language skills in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 6: Result of Analysis of Variance of the influence of regular practice and reinforcement on students' mastery of English language skills.

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	Sig.
Between Groups	33314.559	3	11104.853	49.223	2.60	.000b
Within Groups	87984.235	390	225.601			
Total	121298.794	393				

Significant at $P < .05$ alpha level; $N = 394$.

Table 6 reveals that regular practice and reinforcement significantly influenced students' mastery of English language skills, $F(3,390) = 49.223$, $p < .05$. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of study habits on the mastery of English language skills among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrated that key dimensions of study habits—time management, note-taking and organization, regular practice and reinforcement, and active reading engagement—significantly influence students' proficiency in English language skills. Students who adopted structured and self-regulated learning behaviors consistently exhibited higher levels of mastery in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The study further established that effective time management enhances students' ability to allocate adequate attention to language learning tasks, thereby improving academic engagement and language proficiency. Similarly, organized note-taking and systematic study practices were found to facilitate comprehension, retention, and application of linguistic

knowledge. Regular practice and reinforcement emerged as critical predictors of English language mastery, highlighting the importance of repeated exposure, corrective feedback, and continuous engagement in language activities. Active reading engagement also contributed significantly to students' language competence by strengthening comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical interpretation skills.

In addition, the findings revealed significant gender differences in English language mastery based on study habits, indicating variations in the ways male and female students engage with learning strategies. This suggests that study habits remain an important explanatory factor in understanding differences in students' language achievement. Overall, the study reinforces the view that mastery of English language skills extends beyond classroom instruction to include students' independent learning behaviors and self-regulated study practices. The findings contribute to existing scholarship on language acquisition and academic achievement by providing empirical evidence from a multilingual educational context. The study therefore emphasizes the need for educators, curriculum planners, and school administrators to integrate study-skills development into English language instruction in order to promote sustainable language proficiency and improved academic outcomes among secondary school students.

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