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BEYOND LANGUAGE BARRIERS: RETHINKING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR NIGERIAN GRADUATES

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Abstract: The debate surrounding whether Nigerians should be exempted from international English proficiency tests to study in English-speaking countries in the West has gained significant media attention. It is argued that English is already the official language, widely used in Nigeria for government, media, and education, making it the everyday language for many Nigerians. Consequently, they find it offensive and demeaning to mandate English proficiency tests, particularly for graduate students seeking to study abroad. As part of an academic inquiry into the issue, this paper aims to investigate the perceptions of Nigerian graduates regarding international English proficiency tests. This study offers insights into Nigerian graduates' views, potentially informing educational policy and addressing fairness in international language testing requirements for English-speaking nations. The authors obtained responses through a six-question structured questionnaire and evaluated the perception of Nigerian graduates concerning these tests. Using a quantitative approach, the participants' responses were analyzed and triangulated by situating them in real-life contexts. The findings indicate that a majority of Nigerian graduates believe Nigerians should be exempted from these proficiency tests due to the prevalence and familiarity of the English language in Nigeria compared to indigenous languages. However, an average of 11% of respondents believe that Nigerians should not be exempted from taking standardised English proficiency tests. This is significantly lower than 89% of respondents who believe that Nigerians should be exempted from these tests. This suggests a reconsideration of English proficiency tests for Nigerians, potentially influencing policy changes in language testing and supporting equitable access to international education. The findings also have broader implications for international educational policies and the recognition of linguistic diversity in a global academic environment.

Keywords: English proficiency tests, IELTS, Nigeria, TOEFL, language policy, educational fairness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country in West Africa where English is the national and only official language. English is the language of education in Nigeria. It is also the lingua franca, the language of government, media, business, religion, and almost anything done in Nigeria (Udofot, 2010). With a population of 223.8 million people in 2023, Nigeria boasts of being one of the countries with the largest English-speaking population in the world. As a former colony of Great Britain, Nigeria has more English speakers than its colonisers. The status of the English language in Nigeria is overwhelming, as it is the language used in almost every walk of life within the country (Banjo, 1970).

As the language of educational instructions, the 6-3-3-4 educational system in Nigeria stipulates that a person must have had a minimum of sixteen years of education before they can earn a bachelor's degree, which qualifies the person to be called a "graduate" (Ukpong et al., 2023). The primary language of instruction through these years is English, and as it is the language of social, political, and economic interactions in the country, Nigerian graduates of universities and polytechnics are expected to demonstrate excellent communication skills in English, which cut across the four areas of language acquisition, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Yusuf, 2012).

However, as much as English is widely used by Nigerians and many varieties have been developed and theorised by scholars to represent various echelons of speakers in the country, Nigerian graduates still lag in written expression, as seen in virtual communities on Facebook. They make various kinds of errors, which reflects their proficiency levels in the English language (Danladi, 2014). Hence, this research aims to investigate Nigerian graduates' perceptions of the necessity of international English proficiency tests for studying in English-speaking countries. The objectives are to explore the extent of the English language use in Nigeria, evaluate the perceived fairness of these tests for Nigerians, assess the potential impact on accessibility to international education, and consider how these insights might inform policy on language testing for English-speaking countries. This research seeks to answer two questions: How do Nigerian graduates perceive the necessity and fairness of international English proficiency tests for studying in English-speaking countries, and what impact do these tests have on their access to international education?

2. THE STATUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

The status of the English language is very much incontestable, and there are no significant signals that any other language might take over it in the next century (Arik & Arik, 2014; Shyamlee & Phil, 2012; Wang, 2007). The status the English language has achieved today cannot be discussed without referencing the historical precursors to the advent of English in Nigeria (Banjo, 1970;

Nelson, 2012; Yusuf, 2012). Historically, the English language did not come to Nigeria alone. Its incursion into Nigeria was caused by several factors like trading, slavery, colonisation, and missionary activities in Nigeria by the Europeans, which happened in phases.

To begin with, as for trade, which also included the slave trade, the Portuguese were the first to dock on Nigeria's soil, and they traded timber, gold, ore, and other resources with the Nigerians before their monopoly in West Africa was challenged after the allotment of the region to Britain at the Berlin Conference (1885–1886). Afterwards, missionaries settled in Nigeria and began to teach Nigerians the three R's – reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic. To communicate with the missionaries, many people living in the area which later became Nigeria had to learn English, and the establishment of colonial government-operated schools and the spread of education across Nigeria made English popular in Nigeria (Danladi, 2014; Fatiloro, 2015; Tunde-Awe, 2014; Udofia, 2021).

Adegbite & Akindele (1993) add to the points that establish the widespreadness of English in Nigeria. They posit that it was fostered by the multilingual situation of Nigeria, where there are over three hundred and fifty languages. Thereafter, the English language became a communication tool between people who speak different languages in the country. The wide acceptance of the language has resulted in a situation where it has not only become the mother tongue of many Nigerian children (Adeyanju, 2009; Jolayemi, 2014; Ogunsanya, 2009) but is as widespread as the language is. Many Nigerian graduates and corps members do not demonstrate a good command of the language in their written expressions. The irony is that these corps members, who are on a mandatory one-year service to the country, are often posted to secondary schools, where personnel inefficiencies or their acclaimed areas of expertise may warrant them to teach subjects like English or English Studies as the case may be. The fact that these people do not possess good qualities of written expression points to why many Nigerian students do not write good English. This continues in an unending cycle: teachers whose expressions are poor teach the same poor expressions to their students (Asikhia, 2010).

The English language is the language of educational instruction in Nigeria (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006; Fakeye, 2010; Muhammad et al., 2018). All forms and categories of formal education and meetings are usually held in English. The English Language is taught in schools as a subject from kindergarten to the senior secondary level (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). Even in higher institutions of learning such as universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, students, especially in their first year, are mandated to take a course in English and pass it (Muhammad et al., 2018). The Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), which is the qualifying examination to enrol into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, requires a compulsory inclusion of the Use of English as a subject to be taken by candidates regardless of their prospective courses of study in higher institutions (Bassey et al., 2022).

In business, governance, and media, English is also the language of communication, and Nigeria being a largely heterogeneous nation, has English as not only the official language but the lingua franca too. People from various parts of Nigeria communicate with each other using English (Pinon & Haydon, 2010). The government's business is also conducted in English. The constitution and all other bodies of law in Nigeria are written in English. Section 55 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that the business of the National Assembly, which is the national legislative arm of the Nigerian federal government, shall be conducted in English and Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba after all necessary arrangements have been made (See Adegbite, 2003, and Ofo, 2011). The only feasibly possible language in which the business of the National Assembly can be conducted is English. Hence, English establishes its grounds as the language of government. All these factors integrate to make English very strong and influential in Nigeria (Njoku, 2017).

3. INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH TESTING SYSTEMS: IELTS AND TOEFL IN PERSPECTIVE

As much as the English language is the national language, lingua franca, and the language of educational instruction in Nigeria, some countries where English is the first language still require Nigerians to provide English proficiency test scores in the International English Language Testing System (hereinafter, IELTS) and Test of English as Foreign Language (hereinafter, TOEFL). Since its establishment in 1989, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been collaboratively managed by the British Council, the International Development Programme (IDP) Australia, and the University of Cambridge English Language Assessment. Primarily designed for non-native English speakers, IELTS has gained global recognition and is acknowledged by over 10,000 organizations and governments across more than 140 countries (Adebajo, 2020).

IELTS is required by most universities and colleges in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and other English-speaking European countries for international students coming from countries or regions where English is not the major language. TOEFL is essentially an American standardised English test for non-English speakers or prospective students who are from regions where English is not the official language or the language of instruction in education like China or even French-speaking regions in Canada such as Québec. Some universities in the United States and the United Kingdom require test scores from Nigerian students coming into their school for graduate and postgraduate studies respectively (Hughes, 2008; Jenkins, 2013; Saarinen & Nikula, 2013). Nigerians have been uncomfortable with this idea; for instance, Nova Scotia University in the Broward County of Florida, United States, require Nigerians to provide standardised English proficiency test scores to be qualified for graduate studies. In the United Kingdom, the University of Exeter does not accept a C6 grade in the West African Examinations Council SSCE in English at a first sitting to suffice for programmes requiring a 7.0 IELTS score. Some of the listed programmes are Research degrees (MRes/ MPhil/PhD) in History, Classics and Ancient History, Modern Languages, Liberal Arts, Theology and Religion, MA Creative Writing; MA English Literary Studies, The Exeter MBA, MSc Sociology, MSc Marketing, etc.¹

These entry requirements are impediments to the realisation of the educational goals of many Nigerians who intend to study for their postgraduate degrees abroad (Adebajo, 2020). This is also a huge reflection of the perception of these universities regarding the status of English in Nigeria and the competence of Nigerians in the English language. For instance, the University of Oklahoma waives English proficiency tests for 33 countries and regions around the world but only lists two African countries which are Mauritius and South Africa. In Mauritius, English and French are used side by side, and other Asian languages such as Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, etc. are also used. The constitution of Mauritius does not even state English or French as the “official languages” of the country, the languages are just often regarded as de-facto languages in the country and the Assembly.⁶

¹ The University of Exeter’s admission requirements can be found at <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/study/englishlanguage/requirements/>, and the information found here is subject to change.

² Article 49 of the constitution of Mauritius states that the official language of the National Assembly (parliament) is English, with the provision that members have the option to address the chair in French. This implies that both English and French hold the status of official languages within the legislative body.

Apart from the other problems associated with these proficiency tests, Nigerians have also lamented the high fees of the test. As of 2023, the fees reach up to \$200, which is seen as an “insurmountable financial barrier” for many Nigerians, especially given the country’s economic challenges (Olujobi, 2024). Critics argue that IELTS, which could be justified as a genuine proficiency requirement, has instead become a “cash cow” for organisations like the British Council, whose revenue from teaching and exams exceeded £447.9 million in 2020/21—more than half of its total income (British Council Annual Report, 2020/21). This reliance on exam fees intensified during the pandemic when revenue from exams fell by nearly 40%, leading the British Council to secure a survival loan that it must now repay, increasing the importance of exam revenue.

The financial strain of these tests compounds the challenges for Nigerians seeking to study abroad, with many students unable to meet the financial requirements for UK student visas. According to AHZ Associates, Nigerian students are “most likely to be refused a student visa for financial reasons,” with the high IELTS fees adding a substantial barrier to those already facing significant costs for international education (Ahz Associates, 2021). Thus, the financial demands of these tests not only restrict academic and professional opportunities but also highlight disparities in access to global mobility based on economic means.

4. METHODOLOGY

We adopted a methodical quantitative approach for this study. We published a six-question questionnaire to seek opinions about the perspectives of graduates, corps members, and postgraduate students (Masters, Postgraduate Diploma, and PhD) regarding English proficiency tests. We used the questionnaire to inquire from the respondents if the tests should be required or not. We also gave them a free scale of 1-10 (with 1 being the highest) to rate their English while they considered all four aspects of language acquisition or learning – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The questionnaire was distributed across student and graduate groups on various social media platforms. The responses were collected between April 11 and July 17, 2022, and 147 respondents attempted the questionnaire. They were developed and pre-tested before a targeted audience distribution among Nigerian graduates in Nigeria. These are people who hold at least a first degree (bachelor’s degree) or its equivalent in Nigeria, the Higher National Diploma (HND), which must be achieved after completing a four-year course in the university or polytechnic as applicable.

For data analysis, we considered individual results as a single entity and as a whole. The data interpretation and presentation were computer-assisted using MS Excel and PowerBI to include charts and tables for data visualisation. We obtained a dispersion analysis of the self-identified proficiency levels and the results constituted a significant part of our findings and recommendations. Although the questionnaire was short, we considered ethical judgements and succinctness in drafting and distributing the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents’ identities, personal and online, were protected, which is why this kind of data was not collected. The questionnaire was also made compact to ensure the findings were straightforward.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This research employs an integrative approach to presenting results and discussing findings, seamlessly weaving them together into a unified narrative. This integrated approach guarantees that the findings are not just provided independently but simultaneously analysed and placed relevant for improved clarity. This also aids the connection of data and meaning to the research findings, thus enhancing the research's effort and providing more profound insights.

5.1. Educational Levels and Attainments

Starting with the educational level of respondents, our target respondents were graduates, that is, holders of a first degree (bachelor's degree) or its equivalent in Nigeria, the Higher National Diploma. 120 (81.6%) respondents said they hold a bachelor's degree, which means they have had a minimum of four years of university education (which is statutorily combined with a graded research component in Nigeria). 15 (10.2%) claimed to have a master's degree. 5 (3.4%) of them said they hold a Higher National Diploma, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree but includes an extra year of industrial training.

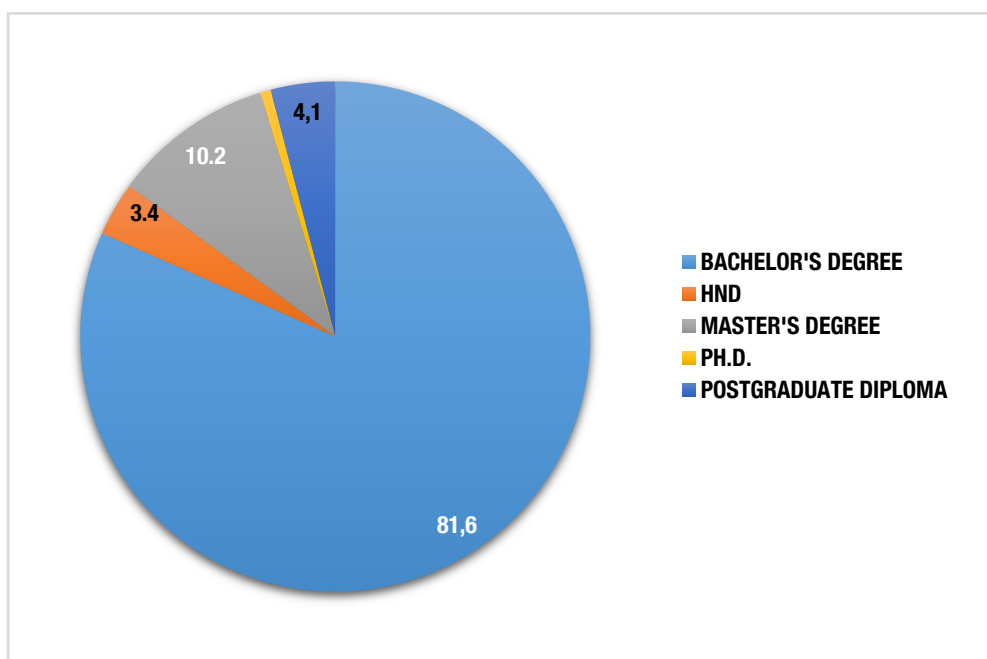


Figure 1. Distribution of educational qualifications of respondents

The Higher National Diploma is awarded by a polytechnic and not a university. 6 (4.1%) respondents said they have a Postgraduate Diploma, which is an extra 12-18 months of further studies usually completed before a master's degree but not necessarily a prerequisite for entering into a master's program. Postgraduate diploma training is often for people who desire to switch to a course they did not study at the undergraduate level for their master's programme or those who did

not achieve a minimum direct entry requirement into the master's programme upon completion of their undergraduate studies. Only 1 (0.7%) respondent claimed to hold a PhD. The doctoral degree is the highest educational qualification in Nigeria and around the world.

These degrees in Nigeria are taught in English, and admissions usually require at least a credit pass in the English language. This means that students who are admitted into Nigerian higher institutions must have developed a considerable level of proficiency in English (Una, 2012). This also implies that English is taught as a subject from elementary school to the university level. Even as first-year undergraduate students, it is required that all undergraduate students must pass a course on the use of English (Una, 2012).

5.2. Country of Study

Studying abroad is desirable in Nigeria, but due to limited financial capabilities, opportunities, and other logistics, the majority of Nigerian students study for their first degree in Nigeria. Nonetheless, some Nigerian students are privileged to study abroad in both English and non-English (majority) speaking countries. To provide context on the educational and current status of the respondents, data were collected on where they completed their first degree and whether they are currently serving in the National Youth Service Corps. A majority, 136 respondents (92.5%), indicated they completed their first-degree education in Nigeria, while 11 (7.5%) reported studying abroad. Additionally, 64 respondents (43.8%) are currently serving as corps members, while 82 (56.2%) are not.

Nigerians and other Africans have a long-standing history of migrating abroad for higher education. African liberal movements like *negritude* and some other major pro-independence socio-political movements that were common in Africa from the late fifties through the seventies had contributions from African students who had gone abroad to study and returned with educational skills and international exposure (Adi, 1998; Hodgkinson & Melchiorre, 2019). In postcolonial times, studies have shown that Nigerians (and some other African students) often favour studying for higher education in Canada (Adeyanju & Olatunji, 2021; Simmons, 2010).

Adeyanju and Olatunji (2021) highlight Simmons' (2010) prediction which suggested that Nigerian and South African students will emerge as prominent contributors to future immigration in Canada. Also, studies have consistently suggested that Nigerians largely study abroad. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, "Nigeria is the number one country of origin for international students from Africa. It sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent, and outbound mobility numbers are growing at a rapid pace." (Carpa Education, 2017).

Firstly, Nigeria grapples with a sluggish economy, resulting in a considerable pool of highly educated individuals facing unemployment. Secondly, as the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria boasts an urban population that exhibits a willingness to seek relocation for improved prospects. Lastly, Nigeria's widespread use of English as its *lingua franca*, coupled with its membership in the Commonwealth, aligns harmoniously with Canada's linguistic and cultural framework, fostering an environment conducive to immigration. With this kind of stability and infrastructure, Adeyanju & Olatunji (2021) say that "they [Nigerian students] are "pulled" by Canada's post-industrial neoliberal immigration policy that targets "self-made" immigrants with resources" (Adeyanju & Olatunji, 2021, p. 106).

Nevertheless, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States are not left out. Most Nigerian students in the UK pay for their tuition, which makes them “important contributors to the educational and economic landscapes of Europe” (Ploner & Nada, 2020, p. 374). For the 2022/23 session, international students contributed £11.8 billion in tuition fees to the national economy of the United Kingdom, which was 22.9% of the sector’s total income (Bolton et al., 2024).

5.3. International Intelligibility

International intelligibility of English refers to the ability of speakers from different language backgrounds to understand each other when using English as a common medium of communication. It is a crucial aspect of English as an International Language (EIL), as it enables people from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds to interact effectively and exchange ideas. The concept of international intelligibility of English encompasses both spoken and written English. In spoken English, intelligibility is influenced by factors such as pronunciation, intonation, and speech rate. In written English, intelligibility is primarily determined by vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. While native English speakers may not always be mutually intelligible, particularly when representing different regional dialects or accents, international intelligibility is generally achieved when non-native speakers of English adapt their speech and writing to accommodate the expectations of a global audience.

Table 1. Reported proficiency levels of respondents

<i>x</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Σ
<i>f</i>	55	55	16	6	9	3	1	2	0	0	147
<i>f(x)</i>	55	110	48	24	45	18	7	16	0	0	323
SD											1.14
Mean Rating											2.20

Table 1 captures the summative results of the perceived proficiency levels of respondents on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 coded as ‘excellent’ and 10 as ‘very poor’. We asked them to consider all four areas of language learning (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and to rate themselves accordingly. The *x* row shows the available rating (numbers) on the provided rating scale; *f* shows the frequency, while *f(x)* shows the product of scale and frequency. SD represents Standard Deviation. Considering the results, on average, Nigerian graduates perceive their English skills to be quite high, as indicated by the mean rating of 2.20 obtained from the data. This suggests a general confidence in English proficiency within the surveyed group. The Standard Deviation (SD) is calculated to measure the spread or variability of the respondents’ ratings around the mean. We found a standard deviation of 1.14, which measures the spread of the ratings. The relatively small standard deviation implies that there is limited variation in how individuals rate their English skills. The clustering of most respondents’ ratings around the mean indicates a consistent level of confidence across the surveyed population. The high mean rating suggests that the majority of Nigerian graduates in this study view their English skills positively. This may reflect the success of English language education programmes within the Nigerian educational system as well as a general sense of proficiency among the surveyed graduates. The small standard deviation indicates that there is homogeneity in the responses, with most graduates holding similar views about their English language abilities.

Although Nigerian English is modelled after British English, the spoken model is said to be Received Pronunciation (RP), and it is not truly British English due to variations in pronunciation and suprasegmental phonology. However, scholars like Babatunde (2002) and Josiah, Bodunde and Robert (2012) have argued that Standard Nigerian English is also “standard” in its sense as it shows the peculiarities of the environment in which it is spoken.

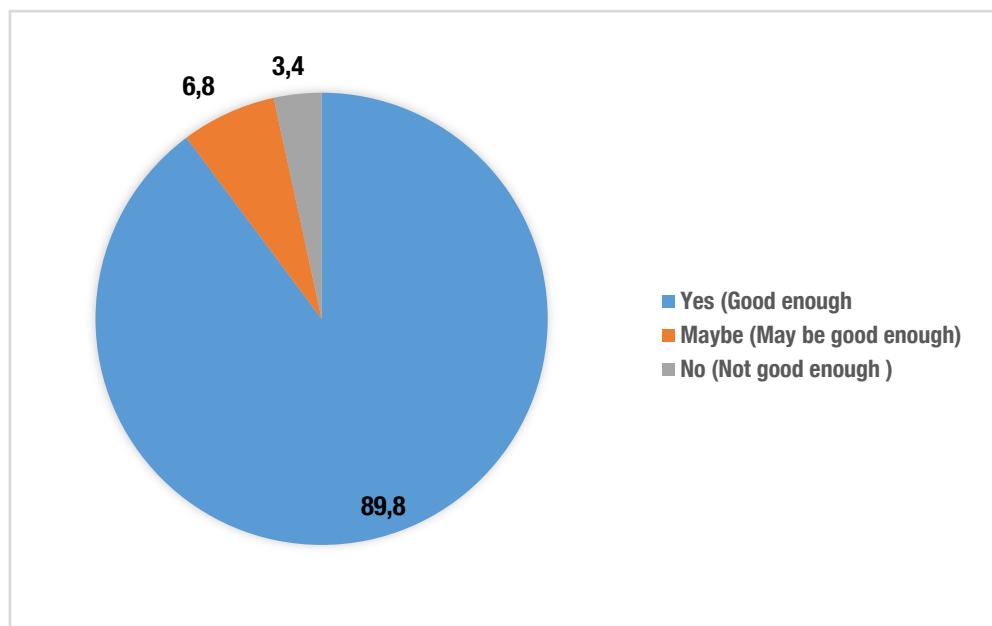


Figure 2. Respondents' self-ratings of English language skills.

132 (89.80%) respondents believe that their English is good enough for international communication. 10 (6.8%) respondents said their English may be good enough for international communication, which means they are not sure, while 5 (3.4%) respondents said their English is not good enough for international communication. On a scale of 1–10, 1 being excellent (highest) and 10 being poor (lowest), the respondents were asked to rate their communication skills in English while considering all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). 55 (37.4%) respondents chose 1, which is the highest on the scale. 55 (37.4%) respondents chose 2; 16 (10.8%) respondents chose 3; 6 (4.1%) respondents selected 4; 9 (6.1%) respondents selected 5; 3 (2.1%) respondents chose 6; 1 (0.7%) respondent chose 7; and 2 (1.4%) respondents chose 8. None of the respondents chose 9 and 10.

5.4. Confidence Levels

Perceptions of international intelligibility can influence confidence levels in language usage, especially in the English language (Gürler, 2015). Confidence levels, in the context of language proficiency or other abilities, pertain to an individual's self-evaluation or conviction on their capability to successfully execute a task or communicate with effectiveness. This establishes important connection points with the concept of self-efficacy³, which encompasses an individual's assessment

³ Even though Bandura (1986) introduced the concept of self-efficacy, its use in the context has expanded over time and has been adopted into the study of language learning.

of their abilities and has the potential to impact their actions, choices, and achievements (Genc et al., 2016; Getie, 2020; Graham, 2022). Regarding language proficiency, confidence levels cover an individual's certainty in their aptitude to understand, speak, read, and write in a specific language. It also includes their belief in their ability to effectively communicate in many settings, including international contexts. Confidence levels are often measured subjectively through self-reporting, surveys, or rating scales, where individuals express their perceived proficiency and comfort in using a language or executing a specific skill (Gürler, 2015).

Splitting the scale at average (*average* 50% = 5) would mean that students who choose between 6 and 10 report having little or low levels of confidence regarding using their English for international communication. However, more than half of the respondents (73.5%) are confident that their English could be used for international communication. The responses further reveal that most graduates sampled for this study are confident that their English is good enough for international communication, which means that they feel confidently proficient in the use of the English language. This also reflects that on the scale, a combined 78.7% of the respondents chose between 1 and 2, which are the top-tier parts of the provided scale. Various factors influence speakers' perceived levels of confidence in a second language, especially English. This may be the willingness to communicate in English (Lin, 2018), perceived confidence in the second language (which is English in this context) (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017), real-life opportunities for communication in the second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998), and interlocutor factors and motivation (Danesh & Shahnazari, 2020; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003).

The final question was asked to get the respondents' opinions regarding standardised English proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL. 146 instead of 147 responses were obtained as participant 89 (P89) reported blank. 114 respondents (78.1%) said anyone who had studied for a degree in Nigeria should not be required to take such tests. 20 (13.7%) respondents said they may be required to take the tests, while 12 (8.1%) respondents asserted that anyone who studied in Nigeria should be required to take the test. A majority of the respondents suggest that Nigerian graduates should not be required to take any of these tests, which is more than the combined percentage (22.11%) of those who said they may or should be required to take the tests. However, some Nigerians still believe that Nigerians should be required to take the tests.

Table 2: Table showing the opinions of respondents regarding taking standardised English test

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Should not be required to take tests	114	78.1%
May be required to take tests	20	13.8%
Should be required to take tests	12	8.3%

Past research into the relationship between English proficiency test (EPT) scores and score profiles, such as IELTS and TOEFL, has shown that there is not always a clear relationship between those scores and students' subsequent academic achievement (Neumann et al., 2018). However, the fact that students considerably pass English language proficiency courses, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or Pearson's English Test, does not necessarily mean that their English has been perfected. Murray (2010) reports that many students who have passed these proficiency tests still struggle because they do not meet "the linguistic demands of their courses due to inadequate levels

of English proficiency” (Nasirudeen & Xiao, 2020). Cunningham (2012) draws attention to the Swedish system. She asserts that many Nigerian students studying English in Sweden face challenges in adjusting to Swedish teachers, who often view them as non-native speakers. Therefore, Cunningham (2012) asserts that “they may fail language proficiency courses and find that their English does not work as well as they expect it to in communication with their teachers and with other international students, in particular those who are non-native speakers of English” (p. 143).

However, the high mean rating and low standard deviation of Nigerian graduates’ self-perception of their English language skills prompt thought-provoking inquiries regarding the need for standardised language proficiency assessments like IELTS and TOEFL. Given the uniform self-assurance exhibited by most participants on their proficiency in English, it seems that a significant number of Nigerian graduates feel adequately equipped without relying on standardised English tests for external confirmation. The minimal diversity in answers implies a uniform level of skill, either stemming from a standardised syllabus or common educational backgrounds. However, the subset of respondents advocating for mandatory testing (20 individuals) and those expressing neutrality (1 person) introduces a nuanced perspective. This divergence in opinions may stem from individual recognition of the variability in language proficiency or a desire for a more objective measure of one’s capabilities.

The rejection of mandatory language proficiency testing by a substantial number of respondents (114) suggests a general belief in the school system’s capacity to sufficiently prepare graduates with English language competency. This sentiment may stem from a confidence in the effectiveness of local educational programmes or a conviction in the practical usefulness of their gained language abilities in real-life situations.

Within a wider framework, the different perspectives on compulsory testing highlight the intricate relationship between self-evaluation, standardised assessment, and the perceived usefulness of these evaluations. The findings indicate that although most Nigerian graduates are self-assured in their English language skills, a significant proportion acknowledges the advantages of obtaining external validation through proficiency exams. This illustrates a complex situation where personal views on language proficiency meet with wider concepts of standardised assessment in the quest for educational and career prospects.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study has attempted a holistic approach to understanding the perceptions of Nigerian graduates regarding the status of English proficiency tests, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the sample size of 147 respondents may not fully represent the diversity of Nigerian graduates across different regions, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. Secondly, the study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias, as participants’ opinions could be influenced by personal experiences or biases toward English proficiency requirements. Finally, the study is limited to quantitative data from a structured questionnaire, which restricts deeper qualitative insights into the personal and contextual nuances of respondents’ views. This can have an impact on the generalisability of the findings. It is therefore important to consider these biases and the potential of their influences in addressing the subject matters, especially in formulating policies that may bring change. While we recommend policy review on these tests, we also strongly advise that prospective study-abroad students should be allowed to make their own cases while their educational histories, on a case-by-case basis, be reviewed holistically.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

International English proficiency tests are one of the requirements that hinder Nigerians from pursuing a degree abroad. The findings of this research show that some Nigerians strongly believe that Nigerians should be required to take the foreign English proficiency tests because they think they are not proficient enough in the English language for international communication. Universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia are places where people from all over the world come to study and English is not only the native language, but also the official language of instruction, communication, media, and the lingua franca. Hence, being proficient in the English language should not be negotiated especially for someone who is going to study for a master's or doctoral degree.

In addition, Nigerians who are entering the UK, the US, Australia or Canada without a first degree from Nigeria or a credit pass in any national English examination such as the ones organised by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), or the National Examinations Council (NECO) may be required to take the test. Most importantly, the Nigerian system ensures that research is conducted before obtaining any degree (or diploma, such as the National Diploma, Higher National Diploma, National Certificate of Education, and Postgraduate Diploma); therefore, it is quite problematic to require that someone who has learned and carried out research in English should take a test, which they would sign up for in English, to prove that they understand English.

Nevertheless, things are changing. People like Dr Olumuyiwa Igbajobi are utilizing email and social media to communicate with universities and colleges in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia about revising their policies to exempt Nigerians from taking foreign English language proficiency tests, and this has so far yielded positive results. We recommend that more Nigerian researchers and professors, both in the country and in the diaspora, also engage in dialogue with their respective universities and colleges to base the requirement for English proficiency tests on individual performance rather than collective country taxonomy. In view of this, further studies on this subject could explore a deeper correlation and draw from a larger population, or even attempt comparative studies of perceptions or outcomes based on diverse factors.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE ON INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING FOR NIGERIANS

We are seeking the opinion of Nigerian students at post-secondary levels regarding international English proficiency tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). We have decided to keep the questionnaire as short as possible.

- ☐ I agree to participate in this research
- ☐ I do not agree to participate in this research

1. What is your highest qualification? (i.e what is the highest degree that you hold?)

- ☐ HND
- ☐ BACHELOR'S DEGREE
- ☐ POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA
- ☐ MASTER'S DEGREE
- ☐ PH.D.

2. Did you study for your HND or bachelor's degree in Nigeria

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Are you currently a serving corps member? (i.e NYSC member)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. Do you think your English is good enough for international communication?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

5. On a scale of 1-10, how would you evaluate and rate your English communication skills (including listening, speaking, reading and writing)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. Do you think that as someone who has studied in Nigeria, you should be required to take international English tests such as IELTS or TOEFL?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe