



**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF FACULTY OF
AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS IN
COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITY,
DUTSIN-MA, KASTINA STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The need to be versed in Communication in English cannot be underestimated as the English language occupies a very central place in the Nigerian society and is the medium of instruction in schools, the university inclusive. Any student that must excel in his or her course of study in any Nigerian University cannot ignore the importance of mastering the use of English language. This research set out to discover the performance of students from the Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology in Communication in English (GST 111 and 112), at Federal University, Dutsin-Ma for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions using Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of Second Language Acquisition . A total of 116 students admitted in the Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology for 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions were used for the study. and data were collected from the ICT unit of the Federal University, Dutsin-Ma. The data covers the GST 111 and GST 112 results of the students. The results revealed that the students performed above average, but the female students out-performed their male counterparts. Also, there was an improvement in the performance of both the boys and the girls in 2013/14 academic session as against 2012/13. The study recommends further research to be carried out to discover ways to ensure better performance in Communication in English among by male and female students in the Faculty of Agriculture.

Key words: Second language, Performance, Agriculture, communication, faculty, students

INTRODUCTION

The official language in Nigeria is the English Language. Its contact with the culture and education in Nigeria can be traced back, first, to the era of exploration when the British explorers arrived the area later named Nigeria; secondly, the period of trade and commerce which gave rise to increased Anglo – Nigerian cultural contact; thirdly, the time of the missionaries and the attendant introduction of western education and fourthly, the period of colonial rule and the consequent establishment of British cultural values, education, sponsoring of Nigerians abroad for studies and the passage of Educational Ordinance of 1926 that gave rise to the need for proper use of English (Omole 2011).

English language plays a vital role in the nation's development and her participation in world trade and investment. It is the medium of instruction especially from upper primary schools as provided by the National Policy on Education (Revised edition, 1989). Text books are written, notes taken and examinations administered and written in English. In addition to its role as the medium of instruction, the language is taken as a subject (discipline).

Apart from serving educational purposes as stated above, the English language performs a host of other functions in the country. It complements the indigenous languages that serve as mother tongues of the different ethnic groups. It exposes the learners to information regarding the cultures of other people. It provides opportunities for gainful employment. It is used for personal and administrative communication. The knowledge of the language bestows on an individual some kind of enhanced social status. The language also helps to project the indigenous cultures abroad.

English is technically tagged as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria as each speaker is expected to learn it in addition to his or her mother tongue. And being a second language, its learning is beset with a host of problems. Although some scholars posit that native and non native learners of English are endowed with Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that operates in both children and adults, the language learning capacity is not automatic in Second language (L2) situation as it is in First language (L1). Second language learning depends on certain factors like personal experience, motivation, reinforcement and intellectual ability (Adegbite, 2009).

Molewa (1979) quoted in Omole (2011) states: "Educational Ordinance of 1926 gave prominence to the need for a proper use of English and made certification a pre-requisite for employment in most profession". He explains further that then, once you failed in English, you failed the entire examination. Since independence, Nigeria ironically elevated the English Language politically and educationally making it not only the language of education but also the sine qua non of social mobility and the corollary of this development is that today every family strives to expose their children to English language right from infancy. Language plays an integral role in education and that this position has been validated empirically by the 2003 National Assessment of the Universal Basic Education Programme as the study revealed that the poor performance in all the subjects was attributable to the poor performance in English language (Omole, 2011).

According to Fakeye and Yemi (2009) the poor performance of students in English language in public examinations in recent times is a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and education standard in Nigeria. Maleki and Zagani (2007) Observed that having difficulties in grasping the contents and concept of the various subjects of the Curriculum taught in the target language (English) fully, seemed to be one of the most serious problems that EFL students faced in their particular course of study. Feast (2002) affirms that when students are deficient in the language of instruction, it follows that they would not perform well in the various school subjects taught in the target language. They then concluded that the overall performance of Nigeria ESL students depended to a very large extent on their proficiency in English language and recommended that the goals of educating Nigerian ESL learners to be proficient in English should be pursued rigorously since their overall academic success was ultimately predicated on their competence in English language.

The L2 English learner is expected to learn the language which is strange to him/her and to learn other subjects through it. This complicates the problem of the learner who is already trying to grapple with the challenges of limited data, exposure, materials and infrastructure, poorly formulated and implemented language policy and insufficient motivation.

Communication in English (Referred to as Use of English in some other Universities) is a four credit unit general course taken by one hundred level students at the Federal University Dutsin-Ma. The course is divided into two and registered by students in first and second semesters of the first year. Communication in English 1 (GST 111 a 2-credit unit course) is taught in the first semester, while Communication in English 11 (GST 112 a 2-credit unit course) is taught in the second semester.

At Federal University Dutsin-Ma Communication in English 1 (GST 111) exposes the learners to Basic concepts in language and communication such as factors that impede effective communication, the parts of speech and grammatical strictures. Communication in English 11 (GST 112) covers such areas as reading skills, Vocabulary development, figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, listening skills, writing, spoken English and Literary appreciation. The goal of the course is to prepare students to effectively use the English language being the medium of instruction and the official language of the country (Nigeria) in their spoken and written communication during and after their respective University programmes.

The role of English Language in Nigeria Education and society cannot be over emphasized. Nwabudike (2012) says "What air is to Living things is what English Language is to the Nigerian School". This being the case, it is expedient that learners take the learning of this language seriously as their performance in the various subjects (science and non-science) depends to a very large extent on their performance in the use of the medium of instruction.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in Communication in English at Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State. The specific objectives include:

1. To assess the performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in Communication in English despite the challenges of learning English as a second language.
2. To determine if male students performed better than their female counterparts in Communication in English in 2012/13 and 2013/14 session.
3. To evaluate the improvement, if any, in the performance of Faculty of Agriculture students between 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do Agricultural students perform well in English language despite the challenges of learning English as a second language?
2. Do male students perform better than their female counterpart in communication in English?
3. Is there an improvement in the performance of Agricultural Science students between 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study has its theoretical leaning on Stephen Krashen's (1982) theory of Second Language Acquisition. This theory consists of five hypotheses: the Acquisition – Learning hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Input hypothesis, the Natural Order hypothesis and the Affective Filter hypothesis. This work adopts two of the hypotheses above, namely, the Acquisition – Learning and the Affective filter. In his Acquisition – Learning hypothesis, Krashen posits that there are two independent systems of second language performance: the acquired system and the learned system. The acquired system or acquisition is the product of a subconscious process which requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication- in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterance but in the communicative act. The 'learned system' or learning is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules.

The affective filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's view that a number of affective variables play facilitative, but not causal, role in the second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self confidence and anxiety. Krashen opines that learners with high motivation, self confidence, a good self-image, and low level anxiety are better equipped for success in the second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

This study used data collected from the ICT unit of the Federal University, Dutsin-Ma. The data covers the GST 111 and GST 112 results of the students from Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology for 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions.

Sample Size

The target population for the study is all the registered students in the Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology of Federal University, Dutsin-Ma for the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic sessions. A total number of 43 students in 2012/13 session and 73 students in 2013/14 session were used for the study.

RESULTS

Figures 1 to 4 below show the overall performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in Communication in English (GST 111 and GST 112).

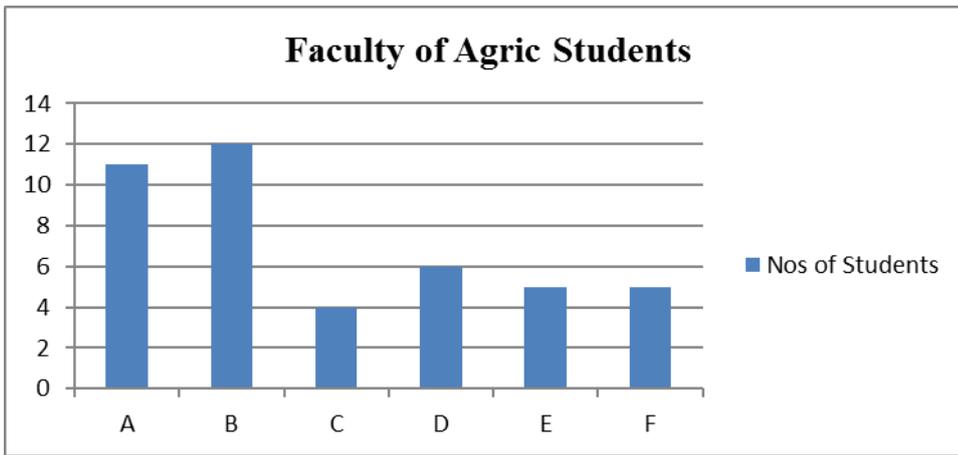


Fig. 1: Overall performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 111 (2012/13 session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma.) (Key: A-F = Grades of students, 0-14= Nos of students.)

The results in Fig. 1 show that majority (62.8%) of the students from Faculty of Agriculture had grades A to C, while the remaining 37.2% falls between grade D to F in GST 111 (2012/13 session). The performance of the same set of students in GST 112 (2012/13 session) as shown in Fig. 2 indicates that majority (60.0%) of the students still falls between grades A to C, though the performance was slightly less than that of first semester by 2.8%.

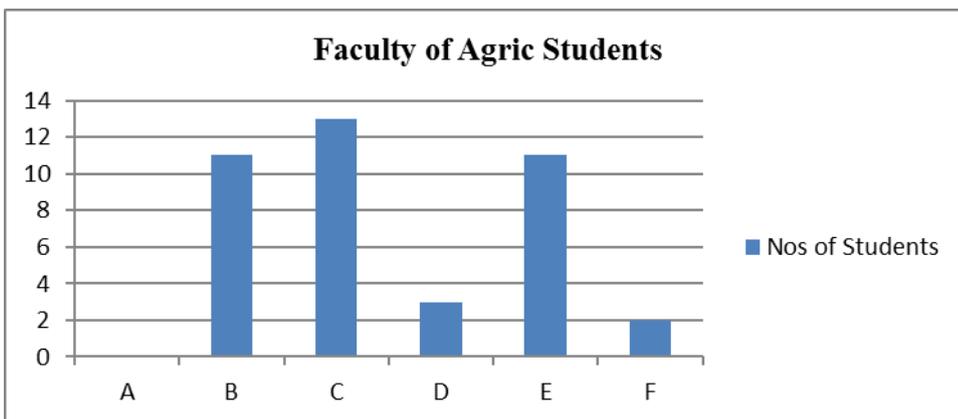


Fig. 2: Overall performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 112 (2012/13 session. Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

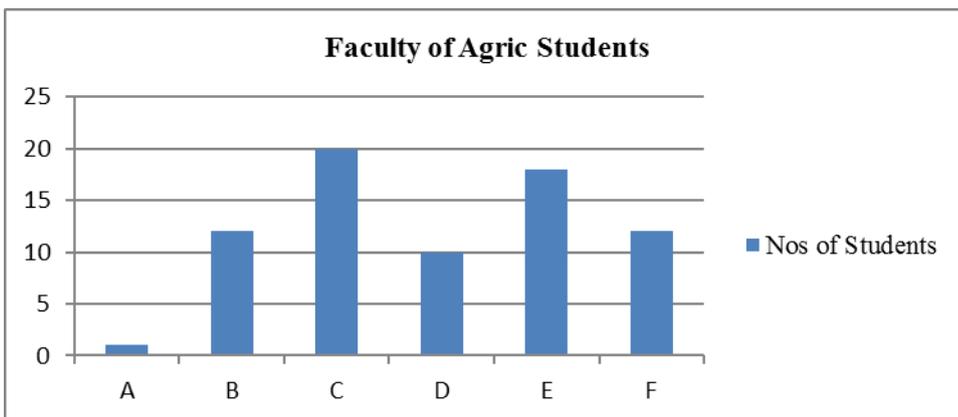


Fig. 3: Overall performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 111 (2013/14 session Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma,)

The results as shown in Fig. 3 indicate that majority (54.8%) of the students in Faculty of Agriculture had between grade D to F, while the remaining 45.2% had between grade A to C. Their performance in GST 112 (2013/14 session) as shown in Fig. 4 indicates that 76.1% of the students had grade A to C, while 23.9% had grades D to F. This is a drastic improvement over their performance in 1st Semester, 2013/14 session.

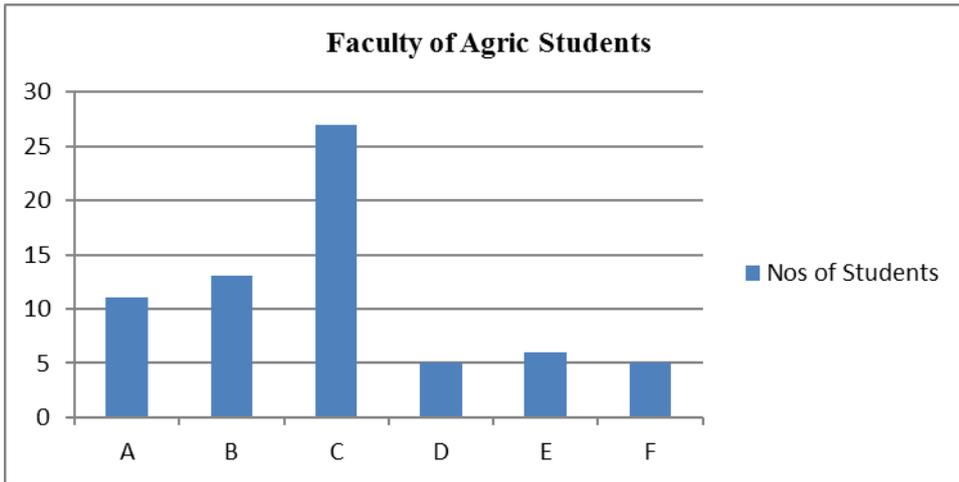


Fig. 4: Overall performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 112 (2013/14 session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

Comparison between male and female students' performance in communication in English

The performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 111 and GST 112 (2012/13 and 2013/14 sessions) based on gender are presented in Fig. 5 to 8.

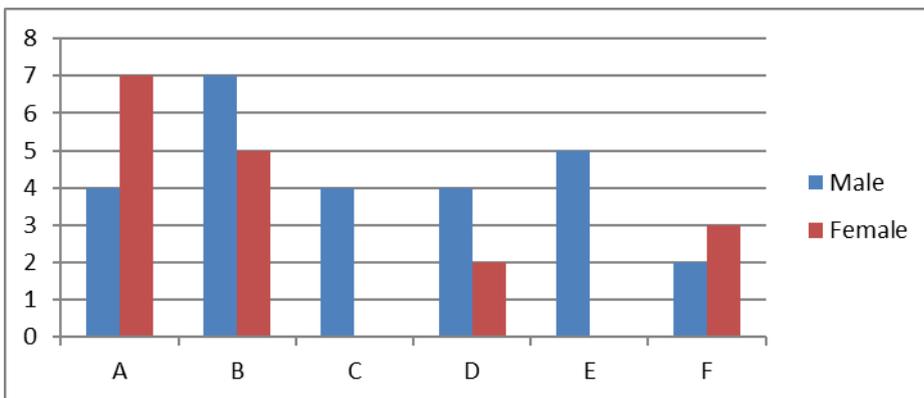


Fig. 5: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture Male and Female students in GST 111 (2012/13 Session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

Fig. 5 shows that the percentage of male students in the Faculty of Agriculture that had between grade A to C in GST 111 (2012/13 session) are 57.7%, while their female counterparts are 70.6%. On the other hand, those who had grade between D and F are 42.3% male students and 29.4% female students. In 2nd Semester of the same session, as seen in Fig. 6, the performance of Faculty of Agriculture male and female students in GST 112 is 54.1% male and 68.8% female respectively for those who had between grade A to C, while those who had grade D to F are 45.9% male and 31.2% female respectively. This shows that the female students in the Faculty of Agriculture perform better than their male counterpart.

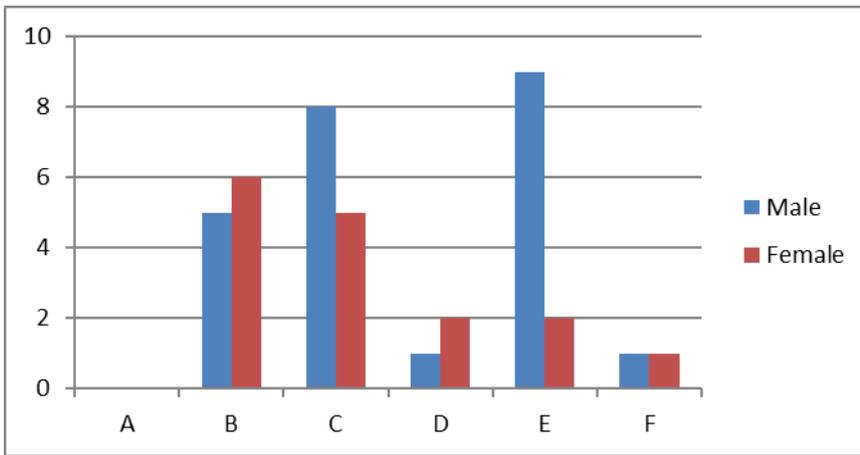


Fig. 6: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture Male and Female students in GST 112 (2012/13 Session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

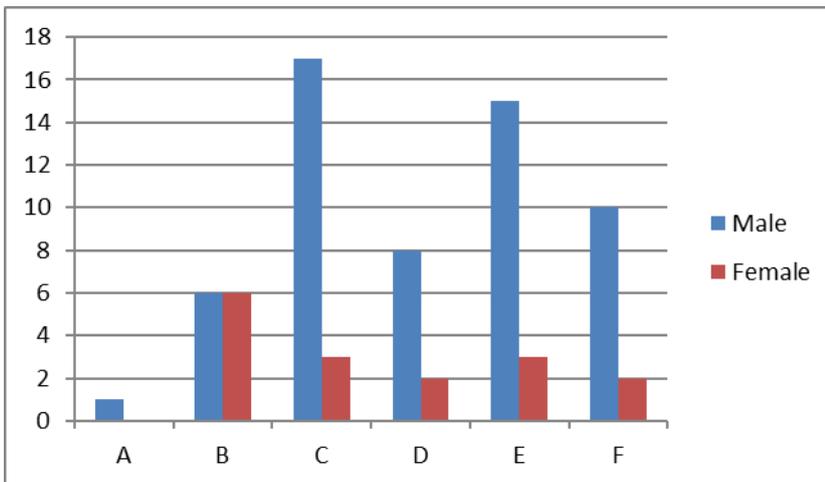


Fig. 7: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture Male and Female students in GST 111 (2013/14 Session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

Fig. 7 shows that the percentage of male students in the Faculty of Agriculture that had between grade A to C in GST 111 (2013/14 session) are 42.1%, while their female counterpart are 56.3%. On the other hand, those who had grade between D and F are 57.9% male students and 43.7% female students. In 2nd Semester of the same session, as seen in Fig. 8, the performance of Faculty of Agriculture male and female students in GST 112 is 73.1% male and 86.6% female respectively for those who had between grade A to C, while those who had grade D to F are 26.9% male and 13.4% female respectively. This also shows that the female students in the Faculty of Agriculture performed better than their male counterpart.

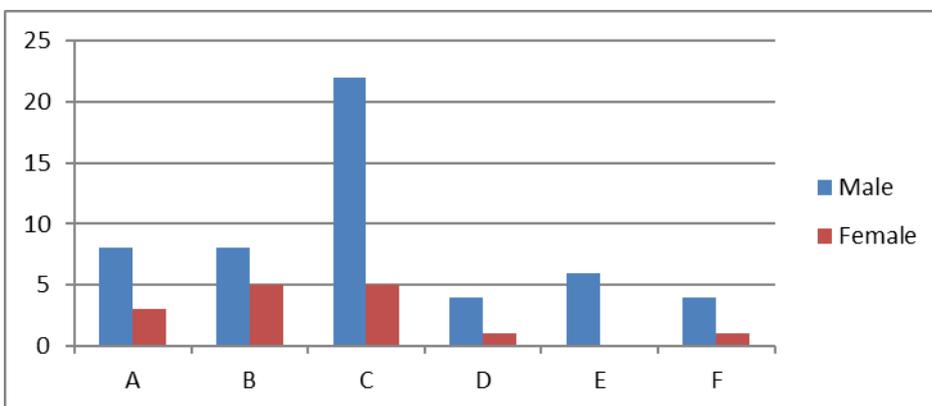


Fig. 8: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture Male and Female students in GST 112 (2013/14 Session, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

Comparison between 2012/13 and 2013/14 session performance in Communication in English

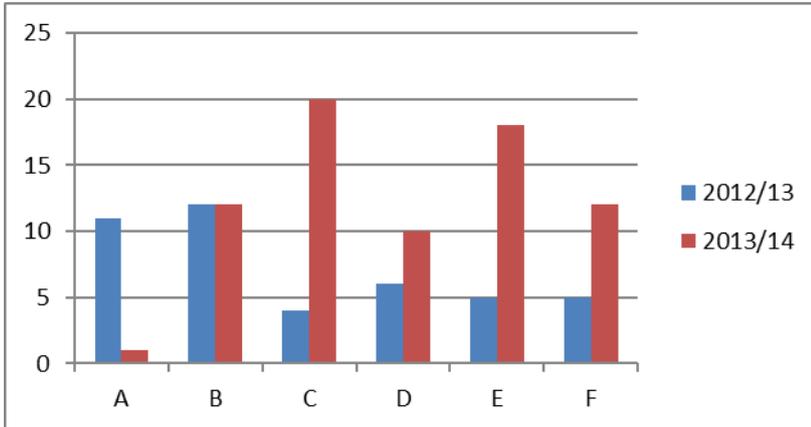


Fig. 9: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 111 (2012/13 and 2013/14 Sessions, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

Fig. 9 above revealed that the percentage of students in the Faculty of Agriculture that had between grade A to C in GST 111 for 2012/13 session as compared with 2013/14 session are 62.8% and 45.2% respectively, while the percentage of students that had between grade D to F for 2012/13 and 2013/14 sessions are 37.2% and 54.8% respectively. In second semester of these sessions, as seen in Fig. 10, those who had grades between A and C in GST 112 for 2012/12 session as compared with 2013/14 session are 60% and 76.1% respectively, while those who had grade D to F are 40% and 23.9% respectively.

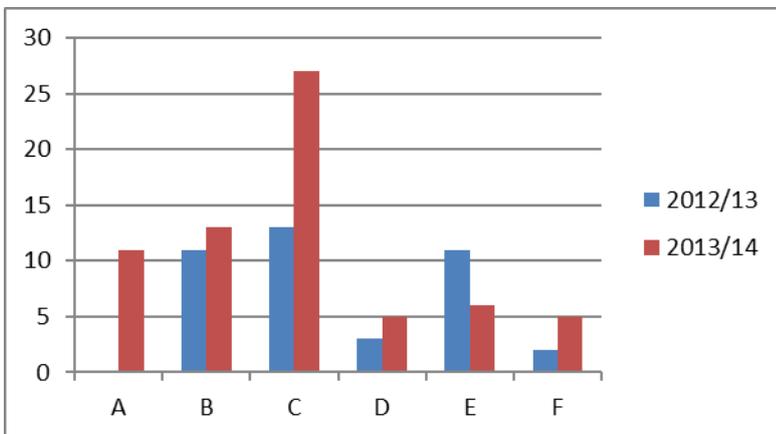


Fig. 10: Performance of Faculty of Agriculture students in GST 112 (2012/13 and 2013/14 Sessions, Source: ICT Unit,Fed. Univ.Dutsin-Ma)

DISCUSSION

The result of the study shows that all the research questions were answered in the affirmative, except the second. The performance of the students (which is above average) in Figure 1 to 4 shows that despite the challenges of learning English as a second language, the students from the Faculty of Agriculture are at home with Communication in English (GST 111 and 112).

Secondly, female students in the Faculty of Agriculture performed markedly better than their male counterparts. This is confirmed by the performance of the female students in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 sessions as seen in Figures 5 to 8.

Finally, comparing the result of 2012/13 academic session with that of 2013/14 academic session, the performance of the students in first semester that had grades between A and C shows a decline from 62.8% to 45.2% as seen in Fig. 9, while there was an improvement in the second semester performance from 60% to 76.1% as seen in Fig. 10.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to discover the performance of students from the Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology in Communication in English (GST 111 and 112), at Federal University, Dutsin-Ma for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 academic sessions. The results revealed that the students performed above average but the female students out-performed their male counterparts. Also, there was an improvement in their second semester performance in 2013/14 as against 2012/13 academic session.

RECOMMENDATION

This study is making the following recommendations for the effective teaching and learning of Communication in English to students at Federal University, Dutsin-Ma. Further research should be carried out to discover ways to ensure better performance in Communication in English by both male and female students in the Faculty of Agriculture. Teachers of Communication in English should devise better strategies to increase and sustain the interest of male students in the subject, since most students perceive English as a foreign language. The students, on their part, should strive to perform better in the said subject.

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