

GENDER, READING HABIT AND PERFORMANCE IN THE WRITING OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL 1 STUDENTS IN ABEOKUTA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the correlation between gender and writing skill among 80 students in a Senior Secondary School One (SSI) class in Abeokuta North Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria. The students wrote a narrative essay as the pre-test ('A terrible accident I witnessed'). Both the male (\bar{x} 3.09) and female (\bar{x} 3.60) scored below average in the pre-test. The treatment applied was the reading of four short stories by each student within a period of eight weeks. Each student read a book per week and wrote a summary at the weekend. The researcher marked the essays and the students wrote a correction of each essay fortnightly. By the eighth week, the students wrote a post-test assessment essay, same as the pre-test. The female students' performance improved, post-test with a mean score of \bar{x} 15.98, while their male counterpart had \bar{x} 14.00. The study recommends that male students should be encouraged to read more to enhance their writing skill.

Keywords: Gender, Reading and Writing, Secondary School, Narrative Essay

Introduction

Gender differences are the common phenomenon in human characteristics and have been used in many ways to compare between male and female in many endeavours, ranging from politics to education. There is the need to consider the effect of gender on

learning outcomes of students, because it has been noted to have effect on the performances of students in the English Language, and to determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic achievement of boys and girls. Studies on gender and academic performance are divergent; some researchers have found that males perform better than females, while for some, the reverse is the case. Knapton (2013) opines that since girls mature earlier than boys, there is the tendency for girls to develop certain abilities faster than boys. One of such abilities is speech; girls are noted to acquire language and language-related tasks faster than boys. It was also observed that 70% of late talkers are boys while girls acquire language faster and have larger vocabularies than boys (Adani & Cepanec, 2019,).

However, Hyde (2005) says gender difference in cognition is slight and we might as well say that male and female are similar in academic achievement as earlier studies by Ayodele (1978), Adegbile (1998) and Agboola (2004) also agree with the consensus that girls have been found in many Nigerian researches to possess only a slight positive edge over boys in language performance. Gesellen (2001) observes that before the age of eleven years, girls perform better than boys of the same age, while boys take over from girls after the age of eleven years. White (2007) further buttresses this position that there is no significant difference as being posited between male and female in writing achievement.

Okoye (1983) and Olagunju (2005) have a different view about gender relationship in learning. According to them, both boys and girls can perform excellently well if they are exposed to the same learning opportunities. Oyinloye (2007), in agreement, notes that there is no significant relationship between gender and achievement in English Language. Agboola (2004) and Popoola, Bodunde and Sotiloye (2013) agree that girls have been found in many Nigerian researches to have only a slight positive but statistically insignificant edge over boys in language performance. Jibowo (1997) and Osikomaiya (2006) found that gender has no significant effect on performance of students in English Language. Onukaogu, Arua, and Jegede (1994) in a study

which determined the influence of achievement, motivation and gender on performance in English Language learning of 160 Nigerian secondary school students found that, if adequately motivated, the students (both male and female) are capable of mastering the English Language. Agu (2014) reiterates earlier studies that when given equal opportunities in language classes, there will be no significant difference in the performance of students on gender basis.

The research carried out by Mori and Gobel (2006) notes that gender as a variable does not have much significant influence on students' performance. Bodunde & Olaonipekun (2009) find out that gender does not play a role in the performance of students in English and Communication Skills in tertiary institutions. This is also supported by Animasahun (2005) and Oyinloye (2007b) as well as Popoola, Bodunde and Sotiloye (2012) who found out that gender is not a significant factor in students' academic performance in English Language. Equally, Sotiloye, Bodunde and Popoola (2013) assert that gender is not a factor in male and female performance in listening skill.

Other studies however reveal that gender correlates with academic achievement. Ogunniyi (2001) asserts that gender differences in writing style and reading choice are evident. Kinkaid and Klein (1990) find dramatic differences in their study of the performance of 40 boys and 40 girls on three types of reading-recall tasks. The boys outperformed the girls on the cued recall task whereas the girls were more proficient on the unstructured recall tasks (IEA, 1996). NAEP report of 1982 in the United States of America showed that females performed better than males at each stage on the reading comprehension exercises because females of all ages tend to read more in their spare time than males. So some of the differences in performance may be attributed to the amount of time boys and girls spend reading in their spare time.

Gbenedio (1996), Akande (2002) and Sotonade (2003) established a correlation between academic performance and the gender of a learner. McDowell (1993) and Olabopo (1999) observe that girls perform higher in language learning. In agreement with this, Coskun (2014) affirms that girls have greater speed and fluency for

acquiring language than boys. Reilly, Newmann and Andrew (2018)'s analysis of students' achievement in reading and writing from 1988 to 2015 discovered that girls, in the United States, consistently over the specified period performed better than boys.

Butler (2000), Akande (2002) and Sotonade (2003) also present a disparity between male and female students' performance in language learning. Gordon (2001) finds out that planned suggestions on a text paper response of girls had a greater effect than on text response of boys. The study also shows that there are many women specialising in language study at the university level.

Research findings that have identified differences between gender groups in reading performance are not as clear cut. Reading however, is the fundamental skill in the development of writing skill. Various interpretations given by researchers as indicated in the literature review often reported discrepancies between males and females in reading and ultimately writing outcome. The reports vary considerably and are indicative of an on-going debate. Thus, a clear-cut dichotomy on gender and language performance still generates controversy.

The objective of the study is to determine the level of difference in male and female writing skill performance. The research question also seeks to find out the areas of difference in the performance of male and female students in writing, while the hypothesis used t-test to determine if the level of difference in the pre and post-test performance of both male and female is significant.

Methodology

The researcher randomly selected 80 students from the Senior Secondary School One (SSI) class in Abeokuta North Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. The students wrote a narrative essay as the pre-test ('A terrible accident that I witnessed'). The treatment applied was the reading of four short stories by each student for a period of eight weeks. Each student read a book per week and wrote a summary of the book read at the end of the week. The

researcher marked the essays and made necessary corrections. Then the students wrote a correction of each essay as indicated by the researcher in the second week. The procedure was repeated fortnightly for eight weeks. By the end of the eighth week, the students wrote a post-test assessment essay, same as the pre-test.

The research question was analysed with mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentages. The hypotheses were analysed with t-test.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the 80 students who took part in the study, only 78 responses from the questionnaire were found valid for the analysis. The female population was above average (69.2%) while the male participants were less than average with 30.8%.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Students

Variable	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	24	30.8
Female	54	69.2
Total	78	100

Field Survey, 2022

Pre-Test Assessment of the Students According to Gender

The comparison of the performance of both male and female students as shown on Table 2 indicates that both the male (\bar{x} 3.09) and female (\bar{x} 3.60) scored below average in the Pre-test. This indicates that the two groups both need requisite skill in writing. Hence the need to generate a form of support to aid them in developing writing skill.

Table 2 Pre-test Performance of the Students According to Gender

Variables	Male (%)	Female (%)
≤10	24(100%)	54(100%)
11-20	-	-
21-30	-	-
31-40	-	-
Mean	3.09	3.60
St.D	1.730	2.050

Field Study, 2022

Post-test result of male and female respondents

Generally, both male and female showed an improvement in their performances as a result of the treatment. About 75% of male and 93.44% of the female students showed an improvement in performance. However, the performance of the female students was better in the post test as 25.92% of them scored above average with a mean score of \bar{x} 15.98 while the male students a mean score of \bar{x} 14.00 in the post test. This means that the female were able to absorb the new method (using reading as a support device) better than their male counterparts. Fewer female (5.56%) scored below 10 marks while 25% of the male scored same. No male scored above 30 marks while 1.85% of the female did in post-test. This may be because the female gender is more disposed to reading stories, novels or anything that is letter-oriented.

Table 3 Post-test result of male and female respondents

Variables	Male (%)	Female (%)
≤10	06(25)	3(5.56)
11-20	15(62.5)	36(66.67)
21-30	3(12.5)	14(25.92)
31-40	-	1(1.85)
Mean	14.00	15.98
St.D	5.672	5.612

Field Study, 2022

Test of Difference of Pre-Test Performance between Male and Female Students

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis 'there is no significant difference in the pre-test conducted between male and female students.' The result indicates that the female respondents performed significantly better than the male students. The test of significance is determined at 0.01 level of significance. The findings of the result show that there is a significant ($t=8.559$, $p=0.001$) difference between the male and female students' performance during the pre-experiment. This implies that the female students had been reading-inclined even before the experiment. The mean score also reveals that female students ($\bar{x}3.60$) performed better than their male ($\bar{x}3.09$) counterparts with a mean difference of $\bar{x}0.51$. The performance of the female students may be because the female gender is usually favourably disposed to anything that is verbal. This corroborates findings by Olabopo (1999) and Coskun (2014) that, girls learn languages better than boys.

Table 4 Test of Difference of Pre-Test Performance between Male and Female Students

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Student Error Mean	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	24	3.09	1.730	0.361	8.559	0.001	Significant
Female	54	3.06	2.050	0.999			

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Test of Difference of Post-Test Performance between Male and Female Students

Table 5 presents the results of the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the performance of male and female students in the post-experiment test conducted. The test of significance was determined at 0.01 level of significance. The results show that there

is a significant difference ($t=12.34$, $p=0.001$) between the male and female students' performance during the post-experiment test. This implies that the female students were more responsive to the scaffolding method of teaching writing skill. The mean score also shows that female students ($\bar{x}15.98$) performed better than their male ($\bar{x}14.00$) counterparts with a mean difference of $\bar{x}1.98$. The performance of the female students corroborates findings by Reily, David, Neumann and Andrews (2018) that, it is a common research finding for female students to outperform their male counterpart in work that require verbal aptitude and language abilities. They substantiated this claim through their work on the investigation of three decades of United States' students' achievement in reading and writing from the NAEP to determine the magnitude of gender differences in writing.

Table 5: Test of Difference of Post-Test Performance between Male and Female Students

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Student Error Mean	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	24	14.00	5.672	0.134	12.34	0.001	Significant
Female	54	15.98	5.612	0.811			

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Results

At the end of the study, the results indicate that majority of the participants (69.2%) were girls, while just 30.8% of the male students responded to the call. At the end of the post-test, there was relatively more improvement in the performance of the female students as their mean result increased from 3.6% of the pre-test to 15.98, compared to the male students who had just 14.00 in the post-test. Comparison of the hypothesis results (pre & post) shows that the performance of the female students is significantly better than that of their male counterpart. The decision for both is determined at 1.0 level of significance.

Conclusion

The female students in the study were more in number than the male students and they performed better than their male counterparts in the study. The pre-test and the post-test results of the female students bore testament to the superior ability of the female students in writing 4 than the male students. The hypotheses of the study further buttressed the fact that the female students performed significantly better than the male students in writing.

Recommendation

Effort should be geared towards the achievement of gender balance in students' performance in writing through the encouragement of the male gender in more reading like their female counterparts.

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Appendix

Research Procedure

Week 1: The researcher randomly selected 80 students from Senior Secondary School I (SSI) class in Abeokuta North Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Pre-Test: The students wrote a narrative essay as the pre-test ('A terrible accident that I witnessed'). After the test, each of the students was given a story book to read for a week.

Week Two: Each student wrote a summary of the book they read in week 2. The researcher marked the essays and made necessary corrections. Then they were given another story book to read.

Week 3 & 4: The students returned the books at the end of week three and each wrote a summary of the read book. The researcher marked and corrected errors. Each student wrote a correction of his/her essay in week four and each student was given a different story book to read.

Week 5 & 6: The students returned the books at the end of week 5 and each student wrote a summary of the read book. The researcher marked and corrected errors in week six. Each student wrote a correction of his/her essay and was given a different story book to read at the end of week six.

Week 7 & 8: The students returned the books and wrote a summary of the read book. In week 8, the researcher marked and corrected errors. Then a post-test ('A terrible accident that I witnessed') was written by each of the students at the end of week 8.