

Sex Effects on Essay Writing Performance under Selected Teaching Strategies in Senior Secondary Schools in Ondo State Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how sex affects students' performance in essay writing under Reading-Writing (RW), Think-Pair-Share (TPS), combination (RW&TPS) strategies, and conventional methods in secondary schools in Ondo State Nigeria. The population for the study comprised all the public Senior Secondary School (SSS) II students of the 2019/2020 Session in Ondo State. The sample for this study was 308 SSS II students that were selected from public senior secondary schools, using a multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument used for this study is the Essay Writing Performance Test (EWPT). The data collected for this study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that there was a significant sex gap in the performance of students taught essay writing using various strategies in Ondo State's SSS. Given the importance of sex differences in the performance of students taught essay writing using various strategies, English language teachers should be aware of the differences in the responses of boys and girls in their classes to various essay topics.

Key Words: Reading-Writing, Think-Pair-Share, performance, and sex.

INTRODUCTION

English has long been the sole official and widely accepted language in Nigeria. It is the only language that has rapidly spread across all ethnic and linguistic boundaries. In Nigeria, there are only a few rural places where people do not speak English. In such exceptional places, Pidgin English will, at least, be spoken. The official status of English in Nigeria contributes to the language's advancement in the country. English has been assigned functions in such sectors as media, education, politics, and legal drafting as an official language. Since the English Language is a compulsory subject in Nigerian schools, it is a valuable tool for human development (Njoku, 2017). Literacy is now defined in Nigerian society as the ability to speak and write English. Someone who is illiterate is unable to read or write. As a result, everyone strives to improve their English skills. Despite the importance of the English language in the Nigerian educational system, overall student performance in English Language has been found to be low (Jen & Adakonye, 2016). The students' spoken and written English are riddled with errors, which could be grammatical, expression, punctuation, or even mechanical in nature.

Language is an essential tool for conveying thoughts and ideas. Fatchul *et al* (2021) opine that language is a set of agreed-upon symbols used by a speech community to communicate. Language cannot be taught in isolation; it must be taught as a set of four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nguyen, 2015). Teachers should work to create the conditions for students to learn effectively and achieve their goals. The four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing must be effectively integrated

for English Language teaching to be successful (Sadiku, 2015). For both second and first language learners, the order of acquisition is generally the same when learning a new language. Writing is one of the four major language skills that language learners must learn. As a result, researchers and educators have worked hard to understand the nature of this skill, as well as the best techniques for teaching writing effectively and communicatively. Writing has long been regarded as an essential skill in English as a Second Language class. It is the area where students are expected to be given adequate time to develop their skills.

Learning how to write however can be impeded due to some intervening variables like the method used by teachers, the sex of the students, socio-economic factors, and location among others. This study will be focusing on how sex can positively or negatively affect student's performance in writing.

Over the years, researchers have investigated the link between sex and student academic ability. Some researchers have discovered a disparity in achievement between boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys in some circumstances (Ullah & Ullah 2019). Sex is a biological characteristic of humans that can be recognized in terms of reproductive organs, breasts, and other physical traits (Harrison, 2023). In terms of sex, human beings are categorised into male and female. On average, there are observable disparities in the physique and disposition of male and female human beings. The disposition of the female child, compared with the male, may make them respond to stimuli differently under different teaching environments and strategies. It could be argued that different strategies for teaching essay writing may evoke different responses from male and female children. Sex could also play some role in the poor performance of students though this is not limited to the English Language. In cultures where there is educational bias in favour of the male child, as it is in Nigeria, the female child is not given adequate support and encouragement to perform well in her education; rather, her attention is tilted towards marriage, raising a family and home-keeping (Olibie, Eziuzo & Enueme, 2013). On the other hand, there are cultures in Nigeria, where the bias is toward the male child getting into the merchandising business early in life; hence, the male child is not encouraged to pay enough attention to education. According to Eble and Hu (2019) norms such as this may discourage students from learning and may affect their performance and eventually lead to premature school dropout. Thus, sex could serve as an intervening variable that affects the outcomes of teachers' efforts, irrespective of the teaching strategy adopted by the teacher. The purpose of this study was to examine how sex affects students' performance in essay writing under Reading-Writing (RW), Think-Pair-Share (TPS), combination (RW&TPS) strategies, and conventional methods.

The difference between males and females could be a factor that can affect their reactions to different stimuli. The interest of students in any given topic on essay writing is germane in a writing class because, Learners may not be motivated to write when they do not find a motive behind writing (Hayes & Olinghouse, 2015). Many teachers may not be aware of these sex differences and as a result, many students may be at a disadvantage if attention is not paid to sex differences in the writing class. Students tend to show enthusiasm when they are given a topic that excites them. There is a need for a teacher to consider giving their students options on what they can write. This will enable the students to pick options that will catch their fancy. This will enable them to write extensively on issues they are familiar with. Teachers must pay attention to students' traits so that they can customise their teaching to students' requirements. If teachers pay attention to some of these themes, they can help students have a more pleasant experience with writing, which will lead to increased achievement in writing.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to examine how sex affects students' performance in essay writing under Reading-Writing (RW), Think-Pair-Share (TPS), combination (RW&TPS) strategies, and conventional methods.

Research Question

The main research question for the study is: What impact does sex have on students' abilities to write essays using various strategies in senior secondary schools in Ondo State?

Research Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for the study is: There is no significant sex differential in the posttest performance score of students taught essay writing using different strategies in senior secondary schools in Ondo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex and students' Performance in Essay Writing

Language is extremely important in various societies. In a society, people do not all speak or write in the same way; each person writes and speaks in his or her own unique way (Soori & Zamani, 2011; Edubirdie, 2022). The use of language features by males and females is different (Alkhrisheh, Aziez, & Alkhrisheh, 2019). Over the years, researchers have investigated the effect of sex on students' academic achievements. In several cases, they discovered that girls performed better than boys (Chambers & Schreiber, 2004; Ullah & Ullah 2019 & Mankumari & Ajay, 2017).

Sex, a biological feature of human beings, could be observed in terms of the reproductive organs, the breast, and other features of the human body (Harrison, 2023). In terms of sex, human beings are categorised into male and female (Boundless Psychology, nd). On average, observable differences exist in the physique and disposition of the male and female persons. The disposition of the female child compared with the male may make her respond to stimuli differently under different teaching environments and strategies. It could be argued that different strategies for teaching essay writing will evoke different responses from the male and female child, respectively. Planning, writing, peer editing, and revising are some of the concerns that gender difference studies on the writing process may explore. Gender differences on the other hand, may include the choice of words, syntax, organisation of discourse, and awareness of the audience (Li & Li 2020).

Many teachers encourage their students to write essays on issues they know very well. The reason for this is because they are likely to have more things to write on if they have chosen a topic in which they are interested. If a topic chosen by a student is strange to him/her, extensive discussion of the topic may be difficult. Studies have been carried out on gender differences in writing. Peterson (1991) explored how gender differences are reflected in autobiographical writing. The results have significant implications for English teachers at all levels, because they point out noticeable differences in the way males and females approach autobiographical writing.

Peterson (2000) stated that girls are superior to boys in writing in another study she conducted on the viewpoints of instructors and students on the relative writing competence of boys and girls. The findings revealed that girls' writing was more thorough and adhered to writing conventions better. This was also supported by Adams and Simmons, (2019); Zhang, Bennett, Deane, and Rijn, (2019). However, a study conducted by Kamari, Gorjian, and Pazhak (2012) on English as a Foreign Language university students found that male students had higher writing abilities in opinion paragraph essays and female students were better in descriptive paragraph essays. The reason for this may be that females like to explain things in detail than males. Pajares and Valiante (2001) also discovered that girls are more confident than boys in writing abilities. According to Pajares and Valiante (1999), students' writing confidence is a predictor of their writing skills. These studies simply demonstrated how gender influences human reactions to events and performance in subtle ways. This is a truth that teachers must consider while grading their students' work.

According to Khaksari, Kashef, and Binjami (2013), learner-centered instruction is critical in education, and teachers must pay attention to students' traits to customise their teaching to students' requirements. This has implications for policymakers and curriculum developers, as it ensures that their plans are in line with the demands of students.

Several research on gender, language learning, and writing have been undertaken. Abdulahi and Bichi (2015) examined the gender difference in the performance of students in English Language in Nigerian secondary schools. They discovered in the analysis based on gender difference that females had a higher mean score compared to males in their academic achievement in English. Females performed above average in both urban and rural schools while males performed below average. Likewise, Obeten (2021) examined personality traits as determinant in English Language academic performance among secondary school students. It was conducted in some secondary schools spread across eighteen Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Cross River State, Nigeria. The finding revealed that there exists significant relationship between personality traits, gender differences due to personality traits and English Language academic performance.

Eriksson, Marschik, Tulviste, Almgren, Pereira, Wehberg, Marjanovič-Umek, Gayraud, Kovacevic and Gallegol (2012) in their study explored gender differences in emerging language skills in 13,783 European children from 10 non-English language communities. It was based on a synthesis of published data assessed with adapted versions of the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDIs) from age 0.08 to 2.06. The results revealed that girls are slightly ahead of boys in early communicative gestures, in productive vocabulary, and in combining words. The difference increased with age. Boys were not found to be more variable than girls. Despite extensive variation in language skills between language communities, the difference between girls and boys remained. They claimed that the difference is caused by robust factors that do not change between language communities.

On the contrary, Attah and Ita (2017) in their study examined the influence of gender on academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students in Calabar metropolis, Cross River State. They, on the contrary, discovered that sex had no significant impact on academic performance in English Language among senior secondary school students in Calabar metropolis.

According to Williams (2004) and Blair and Sanford (2004), boys' dislike of writing in school is a problem that has existed for decades and around the globe. Current research focuses on four major themes: masculine definitions, boys as persons, the gap in achievement, and the disparities in the social, communicative, and gender between boys and girls. If teachers pay attention to some of these themes, they can help male students have a more pleasant experience with writing, which will lead to increased achievement.

Reading-Writing (RW) strategy is a conventional technique for teaching writing in which students use model texts that are provided by the teacher and analysed by the students earlier on in the process. RW is primarily concerned with the properties of model texts. It focuses more on grammar principles in writing instruction and learning (Nystrand, 2006). Essentially, writing in this manner focuses on grammatical and syntactic structures to strengthen writing in a second language (Raines, 1983) as referenced in Tangpermpoon in 2008. Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender, (2020) opine that accuracy in writing is the main focus of the product approach instruction. One of the primary aims of the RW strategy is to encourage learners to produce texts that are similar in the form and language of the models given to them by their teachers in the process of learning writing. RW is learning by imitation. In using this model, learners center more on examining and practicing the key features (content, vocabulary, grammar, and text organisation) of the text genre. These four main features are the focus of examiners in WAEC.

On the other hand, Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a strategy for promoting active learning in the classroom. It is a cooperative learning strategy that encourages students to learn not only from their teachers but learn also

from their social context. This strategy is patterned along with Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which proclaims writing as a social practice (Vygotsky, 1978). DeLange, Dipenaar and Anker (2018) are also of the opinion that learners develop and learn writing skills through 'active' participation within their social and cultural contexts, including their classroom. TPS is a strategy that provides opportunities in the classroom for the articulation of ideas, produces confidence, and competence, and makes students become independent writers and critical thinkers. 'The ultimate aim of any comprehensive approach to teaching writing is to produce confident, competent, and independent writers...' (Blease & Condy 2015:7).

The TPS strategy encourages students to reflect on the lesson's material before the discussion is undertaken in smaller groups. This smaller group can then share their experiences with the entire class, spreading the benefits of small group cooperative learning to the entire class. In the ESL writing class, the cooperative activities promote the integration of the key language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students prepare for this process by employing higher-order thinking abilities and predicting how they will discuss and express their thoughts. According to Simon (2017), the TPS strategy sets itself apart from other teaching methods by providing students with time and structure for thinking on a given topic, enabling them to formulate individual ideas and share these ideas with a peer. It encourages the students to think about a topic, allowing them to frame ideas and share them with a partner. This learning strategy stimulates classroom participation by increasing a high level of pupil responsiveness. For the student and the teacher, TPS serves as a developmental assessment tool. The students can measure their own learning using feedback from the teacher and their pairs, as well as feedback emanating from their own thinking processes. Individual contributions and collaboration with others are encouraged by the TPS concept. This method can be used at any grade level and in any class size.

This study examined how sex influences students' performance in essay writing using RW and TPS methodologies, as well as the RW+TPS combination. When teaching students writing, the results of this study will assist the researcher in determining where to focus attention among the two sexes.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test four-group design (one Control and three experimental Groups). The baseline of the knowledge of students that were used for this study was established by pre-test while post-test was used after the treatment to measure performance. The population for this study comprised all the public Senior Secondary School II (SSS II) students in Ondo State. The students in SSS II were expected to have covered a significant proportion of the English Language West African Secondary School Certificate syllabus, including essay writing. Only co-educational schools were used as a sample. The instruments used for this study are a questionnaire on Students' Socio-economic Background Status (SSBS) and the Essay Writing Performance Test (EWPT). The EWPT consists of five different essay questions and students were requested to answer just one within 50 minutes. These questions were drawn from past questions of the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the post EWPT mean scores by experiment and sex. It provides information on the mean performance of the test subject after being exposed to the treatment in each of the experimental groups broken down by sex. In all four experimental groups, the post EWPT mean performance of female students was better than that of the male students. Looking at the standard deviation, however, the performance of male students appears to be more homogeneous than that of the female in all four experimental groups.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Post EWPT Mean Score by Experiment and Sex of Students

Group Statistics					
Experiment	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	Male	19	7.84	3.91	0.9
	Female	14	11	4.9	1.31
Reading Writing	Male	32	10.53	4.31	0.76
	Female	48	11.83	4.63	0.67
Reading Writing combined with Think Pair Share	Male	48	9.69	4.24	0.61
	Female	55	12.73	4.71	0.64
Think Pair Share	Male	42	6.67	3.29	0.51
	Female	50	9.9	5.67	0.8

Sex could be an intervening variable in the treatment effects of the strategies used to teach students how to write essays. The null hypothesis for the study aims to see if sex did have an impact on the students' responses to the various strategies used in teaching essay writing. An ANCOVA of Post-test performance of students to sex differentials was run to determine the effect of sex, and the results are presented in Table 2. ANCOVA has the advantage of incorporating the pre-treatment performance (pretest) into the analysis thus ensuring the initial knowledge base of the test subjects is considered.

Table 2: Summary of ANCOVA of the post-test overall performance of students to deferential in essay writing to Strategies of instruction.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2241.10 ^a	8	280.14	16.30	.000
Intercept	2773.94	1	2773.94	161.38	.000
PreEWPT	1098.88	1	1098.88	63.93	.000
Sex	348.90	1	348.90	20.30	.000*
Expt	267.35	3	89.12	5.190	.002
Sex * Expt (strategies)	65.25	3	21.75	1.27	.286
Error	5122.13	298	17.19		
Total	39377.00	307			
Corrected Total	7363.24	306			

a. R Squared = .241 (Adjusted R Squared = .231)

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2 shows that the F calculated for sex differences in student performance is 20.30, which is significant at the 0.05 level because the P-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that "There is no significant sex differential in the performances of students taught essay writing using different strategies in SSS in Ondo State" is rejected: As a result, there is a significant sex difference in the performance of students taught essay writing using various strategies in Ondo State's SSS. However, because the F-cal value of 1.27 is not significant and the P-value (.286) > 0.05, the sex of the students has no interaction effect with the experimental groups on the performance of students taught essay writing using different strategies in SSS in Ondo State.

According to the findings of this study, there was a significant sex gap in the performance of students taught essay writing with the females performing better than their male counterparts in spite of the strategies in Ondo State's SSS. The reason for this could be that a female child's disposition differs from a male child's,

causing her to respond to stimuli differently in different teaching environments and strategies. It could be argued that different strategies for teaching essay writing to male and female students may elicit different responses. The findings in this study is supported by Eriksson *et al*, (2012), Abdulahi, S. & Bichi, A. A. (2015) and Obeten, (2021).

On the contrary, Attah and Ita (2017) in their study examined the influence of gender on academic achievement in the English Language among senior secondary school students in Calabar metropolis, Cross River State. They discovered that sex had no significant impact on academic performance in the English Language among senior secondary school students in Calabar metropolis.

Based on a review of related literature and the result of this study, it appears that sex has some impact on students' performance in essay writing. It is critical to acknowledge that these differences exist and opportunities that are receptive to them should be provided. This is supported by King and Gurian, (2006) who believe that this information will help teachers to incorporate in their instruction strategies that will stimulate the unique talents of their students in their various classes.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the Sex of the students influenced their performance in essay writing after being taught essay writing using various strategies in Ondo State's SSS. This could be as a result of male and female students' ability to respond to stimuli differently in different teaching environments and under different strategies.

RECOMMENDATION

Given the importance of sex differences in the performance of students taught essay writing using various strategies, English Language teachers should be aware of the differences in the responses of boys and girls in their classes to various essay topics.

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