

EXPLORING GENDER DISPARITIES IN ORAL ENGLISH USING GAMES TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

This study investigated gender disparities looking at academic achievement in Oral English using games technique. One research question and two null-hypotheses guided the study. The quasi-experimental research design involving non-equivalent control group was used for the study. The sample consisted 151 JS III students drawn from eight intact classes in Idah Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria. Pre-test and post-test were administered to all the groups (treatment and control). A 60-item Oral English Achievement Test (OEAT) which was validated by three experts from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using Kuder Richardson formula 20. The reliability co-efficient based on K – R 20 estimate was 0.86. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that females achieved higher than their male counterparts in Oral English. Based on this finding, the paper recommends, among others, that to better understand the reasons for the differential academic achievement between the males and females in Oral English, a study on the other factors that determine the differences in academic achievement beside gender should be conducted. These include the social cultural factors, school categorization and teacher-related factors, among others.

Keywords: Gender disparity, Oral English, Games technique

Introduction

Gender related disparities have characterized Nigeria's education system at all levels of education from primary to university in favour of males (UNESCO, 2018; World Bank, 2018). Academic achievement is the mark and determinant of a student's success (orlack of) and future. This is true the world over, especially in developing countries that have adopted education as the main route to development. Academic achievement is the outcome of

education and the extent to which a student, teacher or institution can achieve their educational goals. It is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment tests.

There are at least three reasons for studying gender differences in education. These include identifying the source of inequalities, fostering average performance and improving our understanding of how students learn (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012). The OECD further notes that, in the past few decades, the interest by researchers to study gender differentiation in education was fueled by a perceived lack of interest and success of girls in a number of areas of schooling –notably mathematics and the physical sciences. In more recent times there has been a focus on the lack of engagement and success of boys, especially in the area of reading. Education policymakers have to be aware of the differences in academic achievement between the sexes so as to ensure the success of any subsequent policies in achieving quality and equity in education.

One of the most often researched areas related to gender in education is the issue of sex differences, i.e. comparing male and female characteristics and performance. When dealing with the issue of gender and education, it is important to define what gender is and separate it from sex. The need for this differentiation is the implication of the innate in academic performance which is linked to the biology of a person and its effect on human behavior and outcome. The term sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women (WHO, 2018). The biological perspective on sex differences and cognitive performance considers social factors to be trivial or subordinate to biological factors like brain structure. Several researches assert that males have larger average brain sizes than females and therefore, would be expected to have higher average Intelligent Quotients. Proponents of this view include Allik, Must and Lynn (2009). Mackintosh (2008), on the other hand, claims that there is no sex difference in general intelligence.

The term gender on the other hand refers to the economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities, associated with being male and female. Additionally, all societies have implicit conceptions of gender, or stereotypes, which they use to differentiate the treatment of girls and boys (Global Monitoring Report, 2018). Accordingly, while women in most societies take primary responsibility for caring for the family, men tend to be associated with the work outside the home. Swainson (2015) notes that, the assignment of roles and development of skills is defined socially and culturally on the basis of sex. From an early age, children develop behaviour

that is appropriate to their sex roles by limitation of parents and other role models.

Such background literature will inform this study since it will be comparing academic achievements of both girls and boys based on the same examination. This study therefore seeks to determine gender disparities looking at academic achievement in Oral English.

Language learning is a voyage of discovery, not memorization of prescriptive rules. The choice of the most appropriate teaching method has a significant importance to learners; it is crucial to the learning process. Among many different methods and ideas of teaching English, some are perceived as truly successful and efficient. The teacher's role is to find and tailor the best one and conform it to the language classroom. As Kumaravadivelu (2011) comments, "there is a best method out there ready and waiting to be discovered." (P. 88) Methodological inexactitude appears to be the bane of the English language pedagogy in Nigeria. Although there may be no one-fix-it pedagogical approach, whatever approach adopted must be such that will achieve proficiency in a language that has become part of us. The traditional method of teaching may not give learners the opportunity to tackle the intricacies of Oral English. The reason being that the learners would be faced with two languages with different phonemic disparities, as the sound system of the second language and that of the mother tongue tend to be a huge challenge to the learners as they struggle to learn the alphabets and phonetic sounds of their mother tongue and that of the second language, English. To this extent, it is imperative to change our pedagogical approach to one that will be learner-centered to spice up the traditional 'boring' Oral English classes. It is on this premise that this study explores the use of games technique as a teaching strategy in Oral English with a view to investigate its effects on students' achievement.

A game is any specific contest, engagement, amusement, computer simulation, or sport involving physical or mental competition under specific rules, as football, chess, or war games (MacMillan English Dictionary, 2009). It is a complete episode or period of play typically ending in a definite result (Omachonu, 2019). Games generally involve mental or physical simulation, and often both. Many games help develop practical skills, serve as an educational, simulation or psychological role. One of the objectives of using games as a teaching strategy is to maximize enjoyment through capturing the interest of learners (Omachonu & Offorma, 2018). Attested to as early as 2600 BC, games are universal part of human experience and present in all cultures (Soubeyrand, 2010). According to Soubeyrand (2010), the royal games of Ur, Senet and Mancala are some of the oldest known games. Today there are a

variety of games, ranging from competitive sports to board, card, video, pencil and paper, guessing games etc. The use of games as a teaching technique was pioneered by John Dewey in 1944 (Vaillancourt (2014). Since then more researches have been carried out with regard to its application in different subject areas (Ugwoke, 2015; Huyen and Nga, 2016; Peter, 2018). However, the researcher has not come across any study reported regarding the influence of gender on students' achievement in Oral English using games techniques. This study seeks to fill this gap. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to determine the achievement of males and females in Oral English using games technique. To guide the study, one research question and two null-hypotheses were formulated:

- What is the mean achievement score of males and females taught Oral English with games techniques?
- There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of males and females taught Oral English with games techniques.
- There is no significant interaction effect of method and gender on the achievement scores of students taught Oral English with games techniques.

Method

The study adopted a pretest – posttest non-randomized quasi-experimental research design. The population of the study was all the junior secondary school three (JS111) students in the 35 public secondary schools in Idah Education Zone of Kogi State, Nigeria. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to draw 151 students from the 5,810 students that make up the population of JS111 students. The instrument for data collection was a 60-item multiple choice Oral English Achievement Test (OEAT) which was validated by three experts, two from Language Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 which yielded a co-efficient of 0.86. The two groups (treatment and control) were pre-tested two weeks before the commencement of the experiment and their scores kept. The experimental group was taught Oral English using the games technique while the control group was taught with the conventional lecture method. The treatment lasted for six weeks. After treatment the same test was re-administered as post-test to the two groups. The research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the achievement scores of male and female students in experimental group**

Gender	N	Pretest		Posttest		Gain Score
		Mean	Stan. Dev.	Mean	Stan. Dev.	
Male	72	28.14	7.51	36.24	7.21	8.1
Female	79	39.05	3.73	50.54	0.19	11.49

Table 1 shows the mean achievement score and standard deviation of males and females. The result reveals that the males have a mean of 28.14 and standard deviation of 7.51 for pretest; a mean of 36.24 and standard deviation of 7.21 for the posttest and a gain score of 8.1. Similarly, the females have a mean of 39.05 and standard deviation of 3.73 for pretest; a mean of 50.54 and standard deviation of 0.19 for the posttest and a gain score of 11.49 gain score.

Table 2: Summary of ANCOVA table for significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught Oral English

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	29532.220 ^a	4	7383.055	215.857	.000
Intercept	388.744	1	388.744	11.366	.001
Pretest	19258.966	1	19258.966	563.072	.000
Groups	5209.631	1	5209.631	152.313	.000
Sex	102.921	1	102.921	3.009	.084
Groups * Sex	208.138	1	208.138	6.085	.014
Error	10226.819	299	34.203		
Total	437062.000	304			
Corrected Total	39759.039	303			

Table 2 shows Summary of ANCOVA for significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students taught Oral English. The result reveals that the F-value for the groups is 15.31 with the significant value of 0.00. However, this value of F is significant at 0.05. This is because 0.00 is less than 0.05, that is ($p = 0.00$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis is not accepted; hence, there is significant difference in the mean achievement scores of males and females taught Oral English with games technique.

Result on table 2 also reveals that the F-value for the interaction of method and gender (Groups * Sex) is 6.08 with the significant value of 0.01. However, this F value is equally significant at 0.05. This is because 0.01 is less than 0.05, that is ($p = 0.01$; $p < 0.05$).

Therefore, the null-hypothesis of no significant interaction effect is rejected; hence, there is significant interaction effect of method and gender.

Discussion

The result reveals that the females have higher mean gain than the males in the post-test. This finding agrees with the widely held views that females may learn language better than their male peers. Scientific literatures are littered with studies documenting the superior language skills of females (Umo, 2004; Uzoegwu, 2005; Marjah, 2008; Tatro, 2012; and Swaminathan, 2015).

The result on table 2 also shows that there is significant difference in the mean achievement score of males and females taught Oral English with game techniques in favour of the females. The null-hypothesis claiming no significant difference was, therefore, rejected. The implication is that gender has influence on students' achievement. This finding agrees with Kamwendo (2010) who did a comparison of students' achievement in private and public secondary schools in Malawi and reported that females achieved higher than males. This position however differs from the findings of Omachonu & Offorma (2009) and Umuna & Amazu (2018) who from their different studies on the influence of gender and achievement in language reported that observed differences have not always favoured one gender.

On whether there is significant interaction effect of method and gender, the result on table 2 shows that there is interaction effect of method and gender. This finding is in line with the findings of Uzoegwu (2012) and Marjah (2014) who in their separate studies found that there was significant interaction effect of method and gender. The implication of this finding is that language teachers should pay more attention to male learners in the teaching and learning of Oral English since they seem to achieve lesser than their female counterparts. This special attention will bring them to the same level with their female counterparts.

Conclusion

This study was carried out to compare the academic achievement of males and females in Oral English. The finding is that the use of game techniques in Oral English is gender bound; that is, Oral English instruction using game techniques lends itself to gender stereotyping with regard to

achievement, hence the higher achievement of the females over their male counterparts. As the world moves to new dispensations of the 21st Century, the Sustainable Development Goals on education is still struggling with issues of the past, for example, gender bias, access and lack of resources. There is need for a paradigm shift, and that is, to urgently address issues that will take education to another level and adapt measures that will ensure equity in performance for all, an education that will ensure change that reviews the past, adapts the present and pre-empts the future. The focus of this change should be gender and academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following are recommended.

1. Longitudinal survey should be conducted to establish why achievement in Oral English for males tends to be lower than females.
2. To better understand the reasons for the differential academic achievement between the males and females in Oral English, a study on the other factors that determine the differences in academic achievement besides gender should be conducted. This includes the social cultural factors, school categorization and teacher-related factors, among others.
3. Teaching styles and assessment forms should be reviewed to meet gender preferred learning and be guided by researched approaches such as modeling for pre-school age.

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