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Gender- Mix of School and Performance in Written English Language

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of gender- mix-of-school on the first year degree students' performance in written English language. The basic design of the study was survey. Two researcher-structure instrument - "Interference Variables Questionnaire (IVQ) and "English Language Performance Test (ELPT) was used for the data collection. The Interference Variables Questionnaire (IVQ) was developed to elicit information on school attended-single sex/co-educational English Language Performance Test (ELPT) was used to elicit data on the aspects of written English where the learners' errors are developmental and interlingual. These were administered to the 2013/2014 first year degree students Michael Okpara University of Agriculture numbering 600 from 8 colleges of the university. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. Means were used to provide answers to the research questions while t-test analysis was employed to find out if there was any significant difference. The results indicated, among other things, that the English language performance of students who attended co-educational school differs significantly from those who attended single –sex schools. Students who attended co-attended co-educational schools performed better than those who attended single-sex schools.

Keywords: *Written English, performance, gender – mix, school.*

1. Introduction

English language in Nigeria is noted as one of the leagues of colonial administration which has succeeded in elimination of the problems of multiple languages in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 2006). It is clear that English language is not only a sort of clearing house for ideas and interests which branch out into all the other subjects that students study in the university, but its place in communication network is tremendous and it is the medium of external and inter-national communication (Obuasi, 2006). English language acts mainly as a vehicle for that aspect of contemporary Nigerian culture which is reflected in our history, educational system, administrative set up, industrial and technological efforts, political experiments, international alignment preferences and to a large extent in the attitude of the Nigerian elite (Nzeagwu, 2005).

Gender is defined as a social construct involving differences between male and female, that is, the societal role assignment on the male and female sexes and how this quality affects their disposition and perception towards life and academic activities (Okoh, 2007; Thornham & McFarlane, 2011).

The performance of Nigerian students in written English Language is low. This is in spite of the emphasis given to the teaching and learning of English language. Universities, employers of labor, federal and state governments have expressed great concern over the ever-worsening performance of students in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE). A survey carried out by Akintoye and Shofuyi (2002) showed that Nigerian students generally scored lower than students than students from the other countries in the core subjects of English language, mathematics, physics and chemistry. For instance, out of 551,245 Nigerians who sat for English language during the period, only 10.6 percent had credit as against the 33.3 percent recorded by 25,651 Ghanaian counterparts (Akintoye and Shofuyi, 2002). That notwithstanding, virtually all the universities and tertiary institutions insist on a "credit" pass in the subject for purpose of admission.

At virtually all levels of education, performance in English language is inadequate and this continues to affect acquisition of knowledge in other subjects (Bamgbose, 2006). It is on record that significant encouragement through material rewards and opportunities are offered to make the teaching and learning of English language effective in the country (Ademolekun, 1986). In spite of this, universities have continued in their angry protest over the low standard of use of English of many freshmen. These freshmen have crossed the hurdles of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board but are terribly handicapped in their studies by their inability to understand, express and write good English.

Many factors have been identified as contributing to this problem of poor performance. Such factors include the problem of multilingualism, the adverse effect of the learner's mother tongue, lack of qualified teachers, absence of textbooks and teaching

materials that are relevant to national objects, individual background, comprehension problem, social factor and individual differences (Eze, 2004; Nzeagwu, 2010). It has also been established that there are possible linguistic interference variables that play important role in the learner's performance in school (Oluikpe, 1985). Eze (2004) noted that the reason behind poor performance of students in English language examination can be attributed to their inability to interpret written language and also answer comprehension questions in their own words. Obinyan (2010) also opined that students can do well in English language examination if only they can answer the questions in their own words and avoid unnecessary lifting which might result in ambiguous answers. The task of this study is to examine the influence of gender mix of school on the performance of first year degree students in written English language.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The study investigated the influence of gender-mix-of-school on the first year degree students' performance in written English language in the University of Agriculture, Umudike.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research question was proposed to direct, guide and to sharpen the focus of the study.

Has gender mix of school any influence on the performance of the first year degree students in written English Language?

1.3. Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. There is no significant difference between the written English language performance mean scores of subjects who attended single-sex schools and those who attended co-educational schools.

2. Methodology

The basic design of the study was survey. In survey research, data were collected from the respondents to test the hypothesis. Two researchers-structured instruments-"Interference Variables Questionnaire" (IVQ) and "English Language Performance Test" (ELPT) were used for data collection.

2.1. Population

The population consisted the 2013/2014 first year degree students of MOUA Umudike numbering 600 from 8 colleges of the university. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the students from all the eight colleges in the university. The stratification was used to cover the eight colleges. The same percentage of students was not used because some colleges are by far more than others.

2.2. Instrumentation

Two researchers- structured instruments- Interference "Variables Questionnaire (IVQ)" and "English Language Performance Test (ELPT)" were used for the data collection. The Interference Variables Questionnaire (IVQ) was questionnaire developed by the researcher to elicit information on school attended- single sex/co- educational. English Language Performance Test (ELPT) was used to elicit data on the aspects of written English where the learners' errors are developmental and interlingual. There were two types of tests: Structure and Essay.

2.3. Validation of the Research Instruments

The steps outlined below were taken to ensure that the tests satisfy the criteria for validity. To ensure the effectiveness of this validation exercise, the initial content and face validity were assessed by a Professor of English Language. Copies of the instrument were presented to three experts in the various areas of English.

2.4. Reliability of the Instrument

In order to establish the reliability coefficient of the instruments, a trial- testing was conducted using one hundred students drawn from a nearby university who did not participate in the main study. After the appropriate scoring of the responses Kuder Richardson Formula 21 was employed to determine the reliability of the instruments.

2.5. Administration of the Instruments

With the aid of other lectures in the use of English Unit, the researcher administered the two instruments on Interference Variables Questionnaire and the English Language Performance Test under examination conditions. Thirty minutes was given for the completion of the (IVQ) while one hour was allowed for the (ELPT). The researcher drew up marking scheme for marking the tests.

2.6. Statistical Treatment of Data

A t- test analysis was employed to analyze the collected data.

3. Findings and Discussion

Gender- Mix of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T - value
Single	91	88.28	5.49	2.83
Co -educational	509	93.02	15.77	

Table 1: T- test comparison of written English Language Performance means score by gender- mix of school.
 $P < 0.05$ $dt=598$ $Criticate=1.96$

As shown in the Table 1, the mean score for subjects who attended single- sex schools was 88.28(SD = 5.49) and the mean score for subjects who attended co- educational schools was 93.02 (SD = 15.77). Since the computed value of t (2.83) is more than the critical value (1.96) at 0.05 significant level and at dt of 598, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the written English Language achievement mean scores of subjects who attended single- sex schools and those who attended co- educational schools.

3.1. Discussion

The study aimed at investigating the influence of gender- mix of school on the performance of the first- year- degree students in written English Language. The finding on the hypothesis showed that the English Language Performance of students who attended co- educational schools differs significantly from those who attended single – sex schools. When their mean scores were compared, using t- test analysis, significant difference was found between the mean scores of students who attended single-sex schools and those who attended co- educational schools. Students who attended co- educational schools performed better than those who attended single-sex schools.

It is obvious that competition in performance is bound to exist when males and females school together. However, competition in academics is synonymous with high performance. When male students keenly compete with their female counterparts in the same environment, it yields very positive result. Bamgbose (2006) pointed out that the basic errors committed by people using English in bi-lingual situations are usually grammatical and lexical errors which are usually caused by the interference of native dialect and Pidgin English. In co-educational schools, both the males and females are very conscious of the expectations in order to impress the opposite sex and there is that healthy competition. This may have led to better performance by the students from co-educational schools.

Ato (1986) observed that there are areas of gender differences in the performance of students. According to him, boys obtain significantly superior scores compared with girls in their attitudes towards the difficulty/easiness of subjects like English and the sciences. This goes to explain why students perform better in co-educational schools where both boys and girls learn together. Girls may perform very poorly if they are on their own.

Another probable reason for the outstanding performance of subjects who attended co-educational schools might be that both sexes could have been exposed to the same treatment while teaching the curriculum contents. They must have received appropriate and effective teaching by qualified teachers of both sexes unlike in single-sex-schools where staffing is not balanced.

The environment in co-educational schools is usually very competitive and may have also contributed to the difference in performance. Chinwuba & Osamuymen (2011) had reported that high or low performance is not a matter of inheritance but on the basis of environmental circumstances.

Factors of socialization may contribute to the better performance of students who attended co-educational schools. Catasmbis (1995) contended that women are socialized in ways that do not allow them to develop personal characteristics and interests that promote the successful pursuit of academics. Female students in single-sex schools may be affected by this socialization factor.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

Gender – mix of school attended significantly influence the performance of the First Year degree students in written English Language. Students who attended co-educational schools performed better than students who attended single-sex schools.

4.1. Recommendation

Educational policy makers should appreciate that students perform better in co-educational schools than in single – sex schools. University lecturers should bear in mind that students they teach come from different educational background – single sex and co-educational.

4.2. Suggestion for Further Research

The study was limited only to the students in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The following suggestions for further studies are made on the basis of the findings of the study.

1. A replication of this study should be done in other tertiary institutions with an enlarged sample in order to ascertain the general application of the findings and conclusion.
2. For effective identification of variables that are critical to performance in written English Language, it would be appropriate to explore other variables that impact on written English Language performance.

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