
The Gender Factor in Composition Writing with the Use of the Cooperative and the Individualized Approaches at a Junior Secondary School in Botswana

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Abstract

The stereotype of gender in performance in certain subjects is not new. Excellent performance in mathematics and the sciences has been long attributed to the male gender while such a performance in English Language and the Arts has also been attributed to the female gender. The use of English language in schools in Anglophone African countries is regarded as highly important if boys and girls are to be able to communicate effectively in the society. However, composition writing for most students has become an arduous and torturous activity. Two strategies dominate the teaching and learning of composition writing in the classroom setting. These are the individualised and the cooperative strategies.

In an attempt to further address the challenges in composition writing, the researcher has attempted to find out which of the two strategies is relatively more effective than the other, using boys and girls in a Form One class in Gaborone, Botswana as a case study. Specifically, the study attempted to find out whether male and female students would perform evenly using the two strategies to write a composition on the topic 'My First Day at School'. Forty-one students made up of 21 male and 20 female students in a junior secondary school participated in writing the composition on two different occasions using the two mentioned strategies. A hypothesis was formulated to find out if any difference existed between the scores of male and female students taught either by the individualised or the cooperative strategies.

The hypothesis was tested with the paired t-test by adjusting for gender. It was found that the cooperative strategy was more successful than the individualised strategy, while female students performed better than their male counterparts. Based on these findings, pertinent conclusions and recommendations were made.

Introduction

English is used as a medium of instruction in many African countries, most especially in the Commonwealth countries. Botswana, as a member of the Commonwealth has adopted English as the official language as well as the language of instruction in educational institutions.

Data on students' ability to write, their quality of writing and research into students writing generally is either scanty or inconclusive in the present setting (Mooko, 1996). Meanwhile, there is continued noticeable poor performance of students in the written English over the years. The evidence of this is evident in the annual reports of the Junior Certificate (JC) English Examination in 2001. This is the background to the aim of this study namely, to utilise the individualised as well as the cooperative learning strategies in composition writing at the junior secondary school and to determine which of the two strategies is more effective in improving students' performance while adjusting for gender.

The United Nations International Charter as promulgated at the UNESCO conference of 1978 recognises that every human being is free to develop and preserve his or her physical, intellectual and moral powers and access to all domains of education is a right (UNESCO, 1980, p. 22). This being so, the right to perform well in all subjects (and in this case composition writing) in schools should be seen as the right of all students, irrespective of gender.

Research Objective

Specifically, the study examines whether:

The achievement scores of male junior secondary school students differ significantly from their female counterparts in English composition writing according to whether they are taught by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy.

Research Question

The objective of this study therefore triggers a research question:

Does the achievement of male students in English composition writing differ significantly from the female students according to whether they are taught by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualised learning strategy?

Research Hypothesis

The research Null hypothesis is:

There is no significant difference between the achievement scores of male and female junior secondary school students in written English composition according to whether they are taught either by the individualised learning strategy or the cooperative learning strategy.

Brief Literature Review

The Individualised and the Cooperative Approaches

There are different strategies for teaching English composition writing in Botswana schools today. The traditional approach is writing the topic of the composition on the chalkboard, discussing the steps to be followed by the students in writing the composition and then allowing them to write the composition using either of two teaching strategies - the individualized and the group/cooperative/collaborative strategies. It has been noted, however, that the quality of students' performance in composition writing in the Junior Secondary Final Examinations has not been encouraging. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining a strategy that might be effective in improving the performance of students in English composition writing, and in this case the variation between boys and girls. The individualized strategy involves students working alone. They have little or no choice of topic (usually selected by the teacher) or input into the time frame for completing the assignment. Most often the topic is arbitrary. Students usually work alone depending on their competency or inner resources for back-up while following the steps recommended by the teacher.

The same procedure goes for the cooperative strategy except that students work on the assigned topic in groups of about five. Also, students collectively discuss the points and the stages to be followed in writing the composition. Here also, students rely on their own initiative to complete the assignment without much help in terms of pre-discussions and other activities associated with the writing process e.g. drafting, re-writing, revising etc. Even though not much research has been carried out on Botswana students' writing ability, evidence both from parents and official reports issued on yearly examination analysis shows a trend of students' weakness in English composition writing at the junior and senior secondary school levels.

Again, from the researcher's observation as a teacher of English at the secondary school level for over two decades, the impression is that students find composition writing dull, laborious and uninteresting, and would rather avoid it if they could. It appears the feeling is also mutual as far as teachers are concerned. They are equally frustrated at the lack of progress in this aspect of language teaching and learning.

The current Junior Certificate English Syllabus which came into effect in 1996 details the objectives and expected outcomes of the teaching and learning of English at the junior secondary school level. It also outlines skills in Speaking, Reading, Listening, Writing, Study Skills and Literature. The writing skill objectives include among others:

- To communicate accurately, appropriately and effectively in speech and writing both in and outside school; and
- To convey information, and logically order and present facts and ideas based on other subjects of the curriculum.

Furthermore, the syllabus states in part, “The work involved enables pupils to gain further practice in the key areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing, consolidating these skills in interesting and communicative ways that enrich pupils’ day to day language” (p. ii). It can be deduced that an interactive and communicative language course which offers learners the opportunity to use language as a vehicle for the expression of functional as well as interpersonal and social relations is implied.

Group and pair work, modelling and role-playing which are emphasised in the new course are expected to encourage group, pair and individual activities that would enable students to be involved in the learning process and the individual student to be “... encouraged to communicate, not only with the teacher, but also with other students in class” (Curriculum and Development News, 1991, p.15). With such a paradigm shift in strategy to the teaching of English in general and of the teaching of composition writing in particular, the collaborative/group approach to teaching composition writing would be especially useful.

The individualized and cooperative strategies of composition writing were examined with regard to their effectiveness in improving students’ performance in composition writing. In the individualized strategy the individual student is a loner in the endeavour. S/he works alone following the guidelines recommended by the teacher in writing the composition based on the topic at hand. Traditionally, this strategy deprives students of time as well as feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts. The individualised strategy, however, should not be assumed to be bad in itself, especially, if one of the goals or aims of the ten-year basic education programme in Botswana which states: “develop critical thinking, problem solving ability, individual initiative” (Republic of Botswana, 1966, p. ii) is to be considered.

The group work/cooperative/collaborative strategy involves about five students working together to discuss collectively the points and the stages to be followed in writing the English composition. This strategy is in line with the new approach to writing which is seen as

a process whereby students do not write on a given topic in a restricted time and hand in the composition for the teacher to “correct” – which usually means to correct errors. Rather, they explore a topic through writing, showing the teacher and each other their drafts, and using what they write to read over, think about, and move on to new ideas (Raimes, 1983, p.10).

Gender and Academic Performance

There is the stereotype that female students often perform better than their male counterparts in such subjects as English Language and Literature. Extensive research on the effect of gender on academic achievement often reflects the general

belief that males perform better academically than females. Darwin (1896) made an influential contribution to the argument about capability being linked to gender:

The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman ... if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average mental power in man must be above that of women (p. 564).

This is a pointer to the belief that men are superior to women in all endeavours, including academic performance, and it is this within the context of some subscription to this stereotype of female inferiority that this research was undertaken.

Biological factors have frequently been advanced as an explanation of girls' and boys' behaviour, including certain aspects of language behaviour. Boys are believed to be assertive both verbally and by other means. Biological factors have also been related to differences in the cognitive ability of girls and boys (Swan, 1992). The greater verbal ability of girls has also been related to biological factors including the hormone system. Verbal ability has been measured by a variety of tests, including word fluency, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and reading. Preschool girls have performed better than boys, on average on several tests. In the primary school years, it is believed that differences between girls and boys are not consistent, but during adolescence, once again, girls tend to perform better than boys in verbal ability (Halpern, 1986).

The way people speak and write is important both socially and educationally. It affects how they are perceived and evaluated. Girls tend to be thought of as highly able readers and writers. This is consistent with their performance on tests of 'verbal ability' and in school with the fact that many girls enjoy English and achieve good results in the subject. A survey carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit in the UK found that girls tend to do better than boys on reading and writing tasks. For writing, especially, the overall pattern is clear and consistent with girls performing significantly better than boys (Assessment Performance Unit, 1982). Ward (1952) submitted that male students generally had higher average scores than females on the ACT, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning tests, but lower average scores than females on the English test.

Although literature on relative performance of male and female students in various subjects in Botswana is scanty, Ray (1997) found that the academic performance of the girls in science and mathematics in Form Three is far below those of the boys, resulting in very few girls being chosen for science streams in Form Four.

Further, the representation of females in all facets of life seems to be low in comparison to males. The stereotype of the female as cook, nurse and child-carer is prevalent. Although females are now found in male-dominated professions, the idea of equity is yet to be thoroughly achieved in all spheres of life (Adeyemi, 1999). The extent to which this phenomenon is true of English composition writing forms the basis of this study.

Research Design

The research design in this study is the pre-test-post-test research design of Campbell and Stanley (1966) as diagrammatically represented below:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} O_1 & X_1 & O_2 \\ O_1 & X_2 & O_2 \end{array}$$

Where O_1 is the pre-test, that is, scores resulting from composition writing using the individualised strategy;

O_2 is the post-test, that is, scores resulting from composition writing using the cooperative strategy; while

X_1 and X_2 are the teaching treatments i.e. the individualised and the cooperative instructions.

Study Population and Sampling Procedure

The study population of this research was made up of Form One students at a Community Junior Secondary School (CJSS) in Gaborone, Botswana. It consisted of all intakes into form one from Standard Seven of primary schools who had been admitted and posted to this school for their junior secondary education for the year 2004. These students had completed seven years of primary education with about four years of exposure to English language as a medium of instruction. On entry to the school, they were arranged in performance order of their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results of grades A, B, C, D, and E. They were then systematically distributed into form one classes across these grades to effect mixed-ability classes. There were six form one classes each with a representative distribution of high, medium and low achievers. It can therefore be assumed that no one class in form one is significantly better in academic strength than another.

The researcher used 41 entrants of a 2004 form one class for the sample. They were purposively chosen because the investigator was assigned that class for the teaching of English language.

Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study were basically five. The first one was titled Guidelines on Composition Writing in line with the communicative approach favoured by the new English Language Syllabus of the Botswana Ministry of Education. Previous Junior Certificate examination questions on composition writing also reflect this format. The guidelines were included to help students write more effectively. The composition topic was a sequel to a previous content area reading on 'The New School Year' in which 'Sipho' described his first day at school. The choice of the topic for composition writing was in keeping with the integrated approach to language teaching and adapted from the students' class text entitled *English In Action Book 1*.

Instrument 1 – Guidelines on Writing Composition on the topic: My First Day at Secondary School

Write about four paragraphs on your first day at secondary school using the following guidelines:

1. Compare your first day at secondary school with Sipho's.
 - i) Did you feel the same way as he felt or
 - ii) Did you feel differently when you first came to the school?
2. Write briefly about the people you met.
 - i) Were they friendly or not?
 - ii) Did they help or assist you in any way?
 - iii) Would you say they were helpful or not?
3.
 - i) What does Sipho say are the differences between primary and secondary schools?
 - ii) Do you agree with him?
 - iii) Are there any other differences you can think of which Sipho did not mention?
4. Concluding paragraph/Conclusion
 - i) What are your feelings about your new school now?
 - ii) Say why you like or dislike your new school.

Instrument 2: Self-Editing Checklist

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Title: _____

- | | | |
|-------|----|---|
| _____ | 1. | Each sentence begins with a capital. |
| _____ | 2. | Names of people and places are capitalised. |
| _____ | 3. | Each sentence ends with a (.), (?), or (!). |

- _____ 4. I have used (“) to show when someone is talking.
- _____ 5. A line is skipped to indicate each new paragraph.
- _____ 6. I have corrected all misspelled words.
- _____ 7. I have chosen the words that best describe what I want to say.
- _____ 8. I have re-read my writing and checked it.

(Adapted from Cox, 2002, p.344)

Note: To be successful at self-editing students need reminders of what they should look for as they revise and edit their work.

Instrument 3: Peer-Editing Report Form

The piece I read was _____ by _____
_____.

The best thing about this piece of writing is _____

_____.

If the writer wants to change something, I will suggest _____

_____.

Peer Editor: _____ Date: _____

(Adapted from Cox, 2002, p. 342)

Note: In peer-editing groups, students work together to edit each other’s writing, revising without the teacher’s help. This peer-editing form guides students in

formulating specific comments that will provide useful observations and suggestions (Cox, 2002, p. 342)

Instrument 4: Revising and Editing Poster

Before I turn in a piece of writing for a score, I check to see if:

1. Paragraphs are indicated.
2. Margins/Layout are correct.
3. Punctuation is correct: full stops, commas, quotation marks, apostrophes, question marks and exclamation marks.
4. Words are spelt correctly.
5. Capital letters are used correctly.
6. It has an introductory paragraph, detail paragraphs and conclusion
7. It is neat.

(Adapted from Cox, 2002, p.343)

The above is a general revising and editing poster which was posted permanently in class as a writing checklist. Students were able to self-edit relying on reminders in a poster like the 'Revising and Editing Poster' above. Revising and editing could also be done at writing workshops, teacher conferences, and peer-editing groups.

The model of writing assessment used in scoring the final draft of students is as stated by the Botswana Ministry of Education rubric for extended writing (January, 1999), shown overleaf.

	Max. Marks	Sym- bol	Very Good	Above Aver- age	Aver- age	Below Aver- age	Poor
1. Communication							
Overall impression/ Relevance/Own detail/ Register/ Appropriate vocabulary/Fluency.	14	C	14-12	11-9	8-7	6-5	4-0

2. Grammar Correct English idiom/ Sentence patterns/Verb usage/Gender/Pronouns /Prepositions/ Conjunctions/Links/ Nouns/Articles/ Etc.	14	G	14-12	11-9	8-7	6-5	4-0
3. Mechanics Spelling/Punctuation	6	M	6-5	4	3	2	1-0
4. Organisation Paragraphs/Sequence of ideas/Top. S+ DSs + Term. S	6	O	6-5	4	3	2	1-0
Totals	40		40-34	30-26	22-20	16-14	10-0

Instrument 5: J. C. Marking Scheme

The investigator used this marking rubric to grade the final composition written by students. It is a standardised score sheet utilised by teachers and authorised by the Botswana Ministry of Education, Secondary Department for assessing students' written composition. It is also the same score card used by the researcher and a second reviewer to score the students' compositions both for the individualised as well as the cooperative strategies. It is hoped that in this way, the incidence of bias or subjectivity would be prevented.

Data Collection

1. *For the Individualized Strategy*

The 41 students were assigned to complete the composition writing first using the individualized learning strategy. They were taken through the first instrument using the process approach by:

- i) guided discussion of the topic under the guidelines through whole class discussion. The ideas students came up with were entirely their own and were listed on the chalkboard. This was to help students with the vocabulary and sentence forms they might need in their writing. Students then worked individually. The teacher moved around to offer help where necessary on meaning, grammar or ideas. Students used the self-editing checklist in preparing their first drafts. Students then used

the Revising and Editing poster to revise their final draft for assessment. This process took approximately 3 composition writing periods or 120 minutes.

- ii) The final drafts of the composition were collected and assessed using the standardized marking scheme in Table 5. The treatment here stands for the individualised learning as initially represented by X_1 while the writing of the final drafts by students resulting into scores represents the pre-test, that is, O_1 .

2. *For The Cooperative Group Strategy*

The same 41 students were divided into groups of five and taken through the same pre-writing procedure of guided whole-class discussion on the same topic as the individualised strategy. They first worked individually in their assigned groups by using the self-editing checklist to revise their work. Then each student read out her/his work to other students in the groups who then used the peer-editing forms to assess each of the group member's writing and offer suggestions for improvement. Students then wrote their final drafts for the teacher's assessment (as well as the review by the second assessor). This process took approximately 4 composition writing periods or 160 minutes as students took more time reading their drafts to members of the group. The final drafts of compositions were equally collected and graded using the same standardized marking scheme in Instrument 5. The treatment here stands for the cooperative learning strategy as initially represented by X_2 while the writing of the final drafts by students resulting into scores represents the post-test, that is, O_2 .

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The intent of this study was to determine the relative effectiveness of the individualized and the cooperative learning strategies on the overall achievement scores of students in English composition writing while adjusting for gender. Specifically, the study tested a Null hypothesis as to: whether there was no significant difference between the achievement scores of male and female students in English composition writing according to whether they were taught either by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy.

Using the Paired-T test to compare the overall performance of all students in general on both the cooperative and individualised learning strategies, the t-test was separately adjusted for gender. Forty-one (41) Form One students made up of 21 male and 20 female students participated in both the composition writing on the topic 'My New Secondary School' using both the individualised and the cooperative teaching and learning strategies. The researcher and a second reviewer assessed the final drafts on the two write-ups of the compositions. The means of the two scores for each student were found and converted to percentages. Table 1 shows the raw scores in percentages of the male and female students in both compositions based on the individualised and the cooperative learning strategies, and the individual difference in performance based on the two treatments.

Table 1: Raw Scores in Percentages of Male and Female Using the Individualised and the Cooperative Learning Strategies (S/N=Serial Number, G=Gender, C=Cooperative Strategy, I=Individualised Strategy, D=Difference in Performance Using the Two Strategies)

S/N	G	C (%)	I (%)	D (%)	S/N	G	C (%)	I (%)	D (%)
MALE					FEMALE				
1	M	63	35	+28	1	F	75	73	+2
2	M	45	40	+5	2	F	53	58	-5
3	M	63	60	+3	3	F	63	65	-2
4	M	68	58	+2	4	F	73	78	-5
5	M	63	65	-2	5	F	65	65	0
6	M	68	58	+10	6	F	75	70	+5
7	M	43	48	-5	7	F	38	13	+25
8	M	45	63	-18	8	F	60	65	-5
9	M	53	38	+15	9	F	60	45	+15
10	M	50	55	-5	10	F	60	65	-5
11	M	50	25	+25	11	F	70	55	+15
12	M	58	53	+5	12	F	53	45	+8
13	M	68	60	+8	13	F	63	40	+23
14	M	68	63	+5	14	F	58	65	-7
15	M	38	38	0	15	F	60	55	+5
16	M	45	48	-3	16	F	60	55	+5
17	M	53	45	+8	17	F	48	55	-7
18	M	40	45	-5	18	F	75	68	+7
19	M	20	33	-13	19	F	50	55	-5
20	M	20	30	-10	20	F	70	63	+7
21	M	58	48	+10					

Table 1, which shows the demographic characteristics of the students, indicates that 21 male and 20 female students took part in the composition writing using both the individualised and the cooperative strategies. Overall, the highest score in the individualised group is 78% while the lowest score is 13%. For the cooperative group, the highest score is 75% while the lowest scored is 38%. Interestingly, both

the highest scores in the individualised and the cooperative strategies were scored by female students while the lowest scores in the cooperative and the individualised strategies were scored by a male student and a female student respectively.

Further analysis indicating the students' performance vis-à-vis the strategies is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Gains and Loss in Performance By Students according to the Two Strategies

Gain/Loss	M	F	M+F
+ (Gain)	12	11	23
- (Loss)	8	8	16
0 (No Gain or Loss)	1	1	2
Total	41	21	20

Descriptively, the number of students who benefited from the cooperative treatment is indicated by the sign (+). Those whose performance dropped is indicated by the sign (-) while those whose performance did not change with the use of the two strategies is indicated by the sign (0). Data in Table 2 reveal that 12 male students and 11 female students made gains ranging from 2% and 28%. For some students, their scores for the cooperative strategy were less than those for the individualised and the percentages ranged between -2% and -18%. Overall, it is noted that the girls scored higher with the use of the individualised strategy with a mean difference of 9.15% over the boys and a mean difference of 10.07% in the cooperative strategy (Table 3). Therefore, the greatest difference in the treatments was observed among the girls. With some students, strangely enough, their performance dropped for the cooperative treatments as evidenced by 8 boys and 8 girls. The highest scorers both for male and female students in the individualised strategy did not perform well in the cooperative strategy. This phenomenon poses the question of whether high ability students do not benefit from cooperative strategy in the teaching of writing. This is recommended as an area for further research.

Further analysis shows that in the cooperative treatment, most gains were exhibited in the areas of communication, grammar, spelling and punctuation. On the other hand, for those who made slight gains, their scores improved in the areas of surface error such as grammar, spelling and punctuation.

The above indicates that the cooperative strategy works better to improve students' performance in communication, grammar and mechanics – spelling and punctuation. This leaves the teacher with the problem of organisational skills to concentrate on. This does not mean, however, that the other skills should be

neglected. An important observation is that high ability students seem to do better on their own than when they are working in a group.

Those students whose scores remained static for the male students in both the cooperative and the individualised treatments can be said to be unchanged in their below-average performance. Could this represent the group of under-achievers or does this indicate a level of un-preparedness for secondary schooling on the part of the students concerned? Descriptively and on the whole, 23 students gained with the use of the cooperative strategy in comparison with 16 students who dropped and also 2 students who remained static in performance. The above analysis is descriptive in nature and therefore the task that follows involves the use of inferential statistics in testing the significance of the hypotheses on the comparison between the individualised and the cooperative strategy while also adjusting for the factor of gender.

Testing for the Relative Effectiveness of the Individualised and the Cooperative Strategies

Table 3 shows the results pertaining to whether there was no significant difference in the overall achievement scores of students in English composition writing taught either by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy.

Table 3: Paired T-Test Comparing Performance in Individualised and Cooperative Strategies in Composition Writing

Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error	df	t	Significance	Correlation Coefficient
Cooperative	41	56.29	13.220	2.065	40	2.328	Significant	0.691
Individualised	41	52.46	13.550	2.116	40			

An examination of Table 3 shows that 41 students wrote both the drafts of the composition using the individualised and the cooperative learning strategies. The mean score of the cooperative strategy (56.29) is slightly higher than that of the individualised strategy (52.46). On the surface, this means that on the average, students performed better in the cooperative strategy than in the individualised strategy. However, when tested with the use of a paired t-test, the difference is significant at a degree of freedom of 40 with a moderate correlation coefficient of 0.691. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the overall achievement scores of students in English composition writing taught either by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy. The interpretation is that overall, students performed better on the cooperative learning strategy than the individualised strategy.

Testing for the Factor of Gender

The hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the achievement scores of male and female students in English composition writing according to whether they are taught either by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy. The data were analysed with the use of t-test by comparing the group mean scores in the individualised and cooperative strategies and separately adjusting for gender (i.e. male and female students) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparing Cooperative and Individualised Strategies By Adjusting for Gender (Female and Male)

Strategies	Gender	N	df	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Cooperative Versus Individual (t-values)	Significance
Cooperative	Female	20	19	61.45	9.934	10.07	1.953	Significant
	Male	21	20	51.38	14.278		Female	
Individualised	Female	20	19	57.15	13.873	9.15	1.362	Significant
	Male	21	20	48.00	11.895		Male	

In Table 4, 20 female and 21 male students participated in writing two drafts in English composition, using the individualised and the cooperative strategies in each case. The mean score of male students in the individualised strategy was 48.00% in comparison with 51.38% on the cooperative strategy. For the female students, the mean score was 57.15% using the individualised strategy against 61.45% while using the cooperative strategy. Female students scored better than male students on both the individualised composition writing (mean difference of 9.15%) and also on the cooperative composition writing (mean difference of 10.07%). With the use of the t-test and adjusting for gender, the t-values of female ($t=1.953$) and male ($t=1.362$) were found to be significant.

Therefore, this hypothesis which sought to find out whether there was no significant difference between the achievement scores of male and female students in English composition writing according to whether they were taught either by the cooperative learning strategy or the individualized learning strategy, is rejected. This is interpreted to mean that females performed better in composition writing using either of the two strategies.

Although research on females performing better in English composition is scanty, this result agrees with that of Ward (1952) who submits that male students generally have lower average scores than females on the English test. Although

English language encompasses Reading, Comprehension, Spelling, etc, Ward's findings may still be applicable to English composition writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The average raw scores of the researcher and a second reviewer for each student were obtained through the use of a standardised marking guide and used in computing the results.

It was found that:

- The cooperative strategy is better than the individualised strategy going by the significance of the first hypothesis.
- Female students performed better than their male counterparts, in fact on both strategies with a difference of 9% for the individualised strategy and 10% for the cooperative strategy.
- The correlation between the scores on the pre-test (individualised strategy) and the post-test (cooperative strategy) is 0.691 (approximately 70%) and is moderate.
- The result of this study corroborates Crawford's and Haaland's (1972) assertion that group activities appear to lead students to work harder and to discover more than they do when tasks are performed on an individual competitive basis.
- Cooperative learning was advantageous and increases students' academic achievement and interaction. Students had animated discussion even for hitherto quiet students, about grammar, spelling and arrangement of ideas. This observation is in line with the observation of Slavin (1990) who stated that other benefits of cooperative learning includes a positive student interaction and more positive student attitudes towards the class.

Conclusions

While the use of the cooperative approach to composition writing is more successful than the individualised one, the female students are better performers in composition writing using either of the two strategies. This conclusion is made from the results emanating from the case study. It may therefore be necessary to replicate this study using larger population and sample.

Although significant, the correlation between the two sets of scores in the individualised and the cooperative groups is moderate. This means that, on average, students performed better with the use of the cooperative in this study. However, the relationship is only moderate and not as high as expected. It can be concluded from this study that the use of the process approach is very critical irrespective of whether a teacher uses the group or the individualised learning strategy in teaching boys and girls.

Recommendations

The recommendations which arise from the findings and conclusions of this study are discussed under the following subsections (1) Pre-service and In-service Education, (2) Textbook Design and Curriculum Development, (3) Classroom Management, and (4) Future Research. However, in executing these recommendations, caution should be exercised by considering the limitations of this study.

Pre-Service and In-Service Education

Although the connection to the pre-service and in-service education of JC teachers may not be immediately obvious as far as this research is concerned, it may be worthwhile in the longer term in ensuring that teachers are effectively and efficiently prepared. For students at the junior secondary school to be effective in composition writing, their teachers should be well trained. Therefore, pre-service education of English language teachers who are to teach students at this level should emphasise an in-depth knowledge of composition writing in addition to grammar, comprehension, spelling etc. If junior secondary school students are to be effectively taught to write highly rated composition, then their teachers must be well grounded in the art of composition writing. This is a challenge to English Departments and related Departments at Colleges of Education and Universities. These institutions should also conduct workshops and conferences to provide leadership where intellectual discourse on composition writing can take place for the benefit of junior secondary English teachers. Issues during the pre-service and in-service education and workshop sessions of teachers might focus on composition writing as a process rather than on the product. This is probably the main key to addressing the problem of students' inability to write effectively.

Textbook and Curriculum Development

One of the findings of this study indicated that the cooperative learning strategy is effective in the teaching and learning of composition writing. It then becomes necessary for authors of textbooks in English Language to provide series of activities on this strategy in the textbooks. Further, textbooks written by local authors may go a long way in easing the difficulty associated with the writing of composition, as writing into the environment is better than writing out of the environment. The Department of Curriculum and Evaluation can also help by encouraging young authors to publish relevant books on composition writing to ease the dearth of books locally published and also avoid the gender bias.

Classroom Management

While classroom management is a broad term, it is used here to refer to the grouping of students for the purpose of discussion or finding answers to problems in a classroom situation. Since a finding of this study indicates that female students performed better in the two drafts of the composition writing, it is recommended that

teachers mix male and female students together when performing any collective task, be it in composition writing, mathematics, science, or any other discipline.

Future Research

Future studies might examine or partially replicate aspects of this study with additional variables such as socio-economic background of students and performance in composition writing, exposure to the library and performance in English generally, frequency of travels to English speaking countries and performance in composition writing etc. A particular investigation might focus on whether high ability students benefit at all from cooperative strategy in the teaching of writing. Such studies might employ both interviews and observations on site, the use of questionnaires and ethnographic studies on boys and girls.

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