Gender and School Type as Correlates of Secondary School Students' Extensive Reading Habit and Writing Performance in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

Reading is a critical skill, both within and beyond the classroom. The nature of writing too cannot be described without reference to literacy, because the latter subsumes the former. This study investigated the relationship between extensive reading habit and writing performance of secondary school students in Ilorin, Nigeria, based on gender and school type. The research is descriptive in nature. Senior Secondary 2 students were purposively sampled based on the variables of the study. Two schools from each of Ilorin East and South and four schools from Ilorin West were proportionately sampled for the study. Fifty students were selected through the simple random sampling technique from each of the eight schools sampled for the study. A total of four hundred respondents were therefore involved in the study. The data collected through the Students' Reading Habit Questionnaire (SRHQ) and a Students' Writing Performance Test (SWPT) were analyzed using mean ratings, percentages and the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient at 0.05 significance level. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between students' extensive reading habit and their writing performance. Also, no significant relationship between students' extensive reading habit and their writing performance in relation to gender and school type even though a greater percentage of the students (88.7%) recorded low writing performance and ambivalent reading habit. The study recommended among others that teachers should make reading and writing activities at the secondary school extensively functional irrespective of g ender and school type.

Key Words: Extensive Reading Habit, Writing Performance, Gender, School type.

Introduction

Reading has been the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. Humans have been reading since ages and thus words of knowledge have been passed on from generation to generation. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one's living; and thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural, political and academic life. Reading fires the imagination of a person. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to the mind.

Basically, there are four language skills that are universally recognized by linguists. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The skills are procedural and behavioural. Listening and reading are receptive skills because they help to receive and process information, while speaking and writing are categorized as productive or expressive skills. These mutually exclusive linguistic skills are basic and indispensable in learning because they are skills that help the learner seek information (Unoh, 1991).

The functional uses of reading in schools and in most work places continue to be important as a result students need to be able to read flexibly and critically. In institutions of learning, students are required to read books and other printed information to support their learning across all areas of the curriculum. Lawal (1995) asserted that reading is the core of the curriculum because it is unique among school subjects in being both a subject of instruction and a tool for the mastery of other phases of the curriculum. As indispensable as reading is to proper learning, it is not a language art that students develop by chance.

Reading as a language skill has been conceived differently by reading experts from linguistic, psycholinguistic, pragmatic and metaphysical perspectives with comprehension as the basis of whatever type (Lawal, 2005). Araromi (2002) opined that reading is a simple process of decoding visual symbols on a printed page. He viewed reading as a complex process involving comprehens ion, interpretation, analysis and application of ideas. Corroborating this view, Unoh (1991) conceived reading as essentially the process of extracting meaning from printed words. He stressed that without comprehension, reading is a mere visual exercise.

Oyinloye (2002) and Olajide (2009) observed that there are different types of reading. They are skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading. Skimming is a technique used for identifying the main idea of a text or the gist. Scanning on the other hand is reading to look for a particular piece of information, taking note of striking and novel expressions and making cross reference to ensure comprehension of the text.

Intensive reading is also called study reading. It involves close study of a text. This places much emphasis on comprehension; it is needed by students preparing for examination. Olajide (1997) explained that in intensive reading, the student reads with absolute

concentration and steadiness. The speed of reading is slow, so that the student is able to utilize past experiences and contextual clues in assimilating the ideas of the text.

Extensive reading involves exposing the learner to varied reading materials which will enhance the learner's communicative competence in terms of increased vocabulary, knowledge, ability to interpret and increase the art of reading. Olajide (1997) explained that extensive reading is meant to give students insight into the structure of the target material. This type of reading is faster than the intensive type, and it requires the reader to glide through the material with precision.

There have been studies reporting that extensive reading not only benefits learners of different ages, but also in different contexts (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Tsang, 1996; Bell, 2001; Ching Yin Leung, 2002; Soliman, 2012). Findings from these studies revealed that in addition to the gains in reading proficiency, positive affect and reading habits, other benefits derivable from extensive reading include gains in listening proficiency, writing ability, reading speed and even spelling.

Reading cannot be learnt or taught in isolation. It is therefore a basis justifying the combination of reading and writing skills in this research. Writing is the visible aspect of literacy. It is a way of presenting ideas in print and is one of the four basic language skills. The others being speaking, listening and reading (Babalola, 2007).

Olajide (2010) supported the view that reading and writing should be taught together. He suggested that the English-as-a-Second-Language learner may not perform well in either without being sufficiently exposed to the syntactic and rhetorical features of the text. Thus, he emphasized a careful integration of the two skills as tools for national development.

Writing is a social act which reflects the writer's communication skill, and is difficult to develop and learn especially in an English-as-a-Foreign-Language or English-as-a-Second-Language context (Olajide, 2010). The main aim of writing is to communicate by clearly conveying what the writer encodes which the reader decodes correctly. To achieve this, both parties have to abide by the "game rules" which mean certain rules the writer has used to organise the structure into coherent whole regarding a particular topic. "Game rules" give both the writer and the reader a shared linguistic knowledge for communication (Mao, 2002)..

Reading habit is a construct comprising other interlocking variables with cognitive, affective and psychomotor dimensions. It is a subset of reading culture which concerns certain well-defined and regular reading-related activities such as why, when, what and where a person reads. Reading habit is a broad concept which comprises reading attitudes, reading interests, reading problems and reading skills. A healthy reading culture will incorporate all the reading attitudes – intensive, literary and extensive; involves an array

of reading interest areas; less reading problems from robust reading interests and finally enhance functional reading skills consequently (Lawal, 2005). A good reading habit is important for the development of personalities and mental capacities. This habit is necessary for a healthy intellectual growth and plays a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve language proficiency (Subashini & Balakrisihnan, 2013).

While illiteracy, which basically refers to a person's inability to read and write is a problem, alliteracy may be a greater problem. Alliteracy is the lack of reading habits especially among capable or able readers who choose not to read (Harris & Hodges, 1981;Zuberu, 2010). The consequence of illiteracy on the society is alarming. It has the propensity of causing other social problems like armed robbery, stealing and gangsterism among others. In Nigeria, illiteracy rate is as high as the nation's level of poverty (Uzodinma, 1993).

Similarly, with the advent of modern technology, reading which was one of the most favored recreational activity which provided a lot of enjoyment and entertainment to many students and adults began to suffer (Soliman, 2012). Students, once upon a time, did spend much time learning how to read in schools. This seems not to be the case in our contemporary society. Both adults and students alike now spend precious times of the day and night watching programmes, movies on television and videos (Crammer & Castle, 1994; Owuegbu, 2000).This phenomenon has been an issue of concern among stakeholders and researchers and has generated series of debates to the extent that the reading portion of the English language curriculum which is supposed to cultivate in students the culture of reading is brought to query as this has affected the performance of students at both internal and external examinations (Adegbile & Igweike, 2002).

Various researchers have pointed to the fact that the Nigerian society is non-reading (Olajide, 1991; 1994 Adebileje;, 2001; Lawal, 2005). They added that books to many Nigerians is a symbol of status reserved only for elites probably because most reading is done in English which is considered an indication of enlightenment, prestige and privilege. Consequently, the performances of students at both internally-organized and external examinations have not been satisfactory.

The role of gender as a complex system of social relations has been construed differently as having influence on English language learning and use. Omodara (2010) found that boys prefer second language communication outside the class than females. Similarly, Fakeye (2010) reported that there is a significant difference in the academic ability of male students in English language with a higher mean score going to the females. Conversely, Thomas and Stocton (2003) found females performing more than males, value reading significantly more than males and consider themselves as being more competent than males.

School type also has a great influence on the instructional achievement and performance in English language. This is because the environment in which a child finds himself goes a

long way to determining his ability and academic performance. According to Omodara (2010) and Abdulasalam (2011), students in urban settings outperform those in the rural areas in English. The reasons for these differences in performance are attributed to the availability of instructional and infrastructural facilities. This variable may have a relationship on students' reading habits and writing performances consequently. The purpose of this study is to investigate gender and school type as correlates of secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.

The loci of the study, Ilorin is the capital city of Kwara, also known as the State of Harmony. It is located approximately on latitude $8^{o}30'N$ of the equator and longitude $4^{o}35'E$ of the Greenwich Meridian and has an area of about $100km^2$ in the north central geopolitical zone. The choice of Ilorin in this study is informed by the fact that it is one of the fastest growing urban centres in Nigeria partly because of the centrality of the city, the rapid growth of commerce, industralisation and other social aspects.

Research Questions

The study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the extensive reading habit of secondary school students in Ilorin?
2. What is the writing performance of secondary school students in Ilorin?
3. Is there any relationship between students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study: Ho1: There is no significant relationship between secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between male secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between female secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.

Methodology

This research is a descriptive survey. Survey was chosen for this study because it enabled the researchers to collect large amount of data on the students to be involved in the study. The rationale for the choice of the descriptive research is that it helps to describe aspects of situations, prevailing practices and conditions such as that which the study sets to ascertain.

The population for the study comprises all senior secondary school students in Ilorin which is made up of Ilorin East, South and West Local Government Areas. Statistics available at the Kwara State Teaching Service Commission, Ilorin, as at the time of the study revealed that there are 4815, 5584 and 8720 students in each of the Local

Governments respectively. This gives a total of 19,119 students. Of this number, 399 were randomly sampled based on the Israel's Model (2003).

Eight schools were purposively selected for the study. Two schools from each of Ilorin East and South and four schools from Ilorin West were proportionately sampled for the study. Also, fifty (50) students were selected through the simple random sampling technique from each of the eight schools sampled for the study. Similarly, students of secondary schools, specifically those of SS2 were purposively sampled for this study because reading at this level is aimed at guiding students to learn through reading. In writing too, it is envisaged that with enough practice through early exposure, students will learn to write well.

Two research instruments were used to gather data for this study. The first is a questionnaire adapted from Lawal's (2005) and Zuberu's (2010) studies. These were used to collect data on students' reading habits. The questionnaire was designed based on the habit of students to reading various language-based materials. The second instrument was adopted from NECO and used to test students' writing performance. It is a standardized instrument adopted from a past NECO examination. The scores of the students from the writing test were taken as measures of their writing performance. That is, low, average or high.

The data collected for this study were analyzed using percentages and the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficientat 0.05 alpha level of significance. The data collected were coded using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for windows.

Results

Question 1: *What is the extensive reading habit of secondary school students in Ilorin?*

In order to answer this research question, responses of the students to reading materials were collated. The set of data were then subjected to descriptive statistics (mean) as shown below:

Table 1: Extensive Reading Habit of Secondary School Students

N	Materials	Very Often (%)	Often (%)	Not Often (%)	Never (%)	Mean	Decision
11	Textbooks	55.6	33.6	10.0	0.8	3.44	Ambivalent
17	Religious books	52.4	33.8	13.0	0.8	3.38	Ambivalent
4	Jokes	55.9	26.6	15.8	1.8	3.37	Ambivalent
20	Text messages	47.4	27.7	20.6	4.5	3.18	Ambivalent

10	News magazines	38.3	32.6	27.3	1.8	3.08	Ambivalent
18	Newspapers	38.8	31.8	26.6	2.8	3.07	Ambivalent
1	Adventure stories	35.8	36.3	24.8	3.0	3.05	Ambivalent
9	Current affairs	35.6	36.1	25.8	2.5	3.04	Ambivalent
3	Folk tales	35.8	27.8	31.8	4.5	2.95	Ambivalent
2	Science fiction	29.8	25.8	34.8	9.5	2.76	Ambivalent
7	Animal-related books	26.3	30.3	34.1	9.3	2.74	Ambivalent
6	Song lyrics	26.3	23.8	32.6	13.3	2.71	Ambivalent
8	Historical books	28.6	21.8	41.6	8.0	2.71	Ambivalent
19	Manual instructions	20.8	33.3	39.6	6.3	2.69	Ambivalent
16	E-mails	21.6	33.7	30.7	14.1	2.63	Ambivalent
12	Encyclopedias	21.3	28.1	33.3	11.8	2.59	Ambivalent
15	War/spy novels	23.3	23.8	37.3	15.5	2.55	Ambivalent
14	Sports magazines	25.1	20.1	34.6	20.3	2.50	Ambivalent
13	Recipe books	17.8	28.3	39.3	14.5	2.49	Ambivalent
5	Romance books	17.3	16.0	34.6	32.1	2.19	Negative

Note: Positive: 3.50-4.0, Ambivalent: 2.40-3.49 and Negative Habits: 1.0-2.39

Table 1 reveals that textbooks ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.44 in the scale of reading materials. 55.6% read their text books very often, 33.6% often, 10.0% not often, while 0.8% never read their textbooks at all. Religious books ranked 2ndwith a mean score of 3.38. 52.4% read religious books very often, 33.8% often, 13.0% not often and 0.8% never. The 3rd in the rank were materials on jokes with a mean score of 3.37. 55.9%read jokes very often, 33.8% often, 15.8% not often and 1.8% never. Text messages ranked 4th with a mean score of 3.18. The percentages were 47.4%, 27.6%, 20.6% and 4.5%, respectively.

Furthermore, news magazines with a mean score of 3.08 ranked 5thwith percentages of 38.3%, 32.6%, 27.3% and 1.8%. Sixth in the rank, with a mean score of 3.07, were newspapers with 38.8%, 31.8%, 26.6% and 2.8%. With percentages of 35.8%, 36.3%, 24.8% and 3.0%, Adventure stories ranked 7th with a mean score of 3.05. Current affairs had a mean score of 3.04as it ranked 8th with 35.6%, 36.1%, 25.8% and 2.5%, respectively. The 9thon the rank was Folk tales which had 35.8%, 27.8%, 31.8% and 4.5%. It however had a mean score of 2.95. Science fiction had a mean score of 2.76 and ranked 10th with percentages of 29.8%, 25.8%, 34.8% and 9.5%, respectively.

Further still, Animals-related books with 26.3%, 30.3%, 34.1%, and 9.3% and mean score of 2.74, ranked 11th. The 12th in the rank was a tie between Song lyrics and Historical books. The percentages for song lyrics were 26.3%, 23.8%, 32.6% and 13.3%, while those of Historical books were 28.6%, 21.8%, 41.6% and 8.0%, respectively. The mean score for the two was 2.71. To rank 14th with 2.69as mean score and percentages of 20.8%, 33.3%, 39.6% and 6.3% was Manual instructions. E-mails had a mean score of 2.63 with 21.6%, 33.7%, 30.7% and 14.1%. It ranked 15th. The 16thon the rank was Encyclopedias with 21.3%, 28.1%, 33.8% and 11.8% with a mean score of 2.59. In addition, Wars/spy novels ranked 17thwith a mean score of 2.55 and 23.3%, 23.8%, 37.3% and15.5%, respectively. The 18thrank was for Sports magazines with a mean score of 2.50 and 25.1%, 20.1%, 34.6% and 20.3%. With 17.8%, 28.3%, 39.3% and 14.5% with a mean score of 2.49, Recipe books ranked 19th. Romance books came last on the list with 17.3%, 16.0%, 34.6% and 32.1%. It had a mean score of 2.19as it ranked 20th.

These results reveals that majority of the students have an ambivalent reading habit. This is confirmed by the number of students whose mean fall within 2.40 - 3.49 to the various reading materials. Of the different reading materials available to students, majority prefer reading their textbooks to any other material because they perhaps want to pass their examinations or simply because they were compelled by their teachers or parents. However, the students also read other materials for reasons such as religion, entertainment, information and for relaxation.

Question 2: *What is the writing performance of secondary school students in Ilorin?*
In order to answer this research question, scores of students from the Writing Performance Test were assessed and collated. The set of data were converted to percentages, the ratings were low, average and high writing performances. The output is illustrated in the table below:

Table 2: Writing Performance of Secondary School Students

Writing performance	Frequency	Percentage(%)
0 – 17 (low)	354	88.7%
18 – 34 (average)	45	11.3%
35 – 50 (high)	00	0%
Total	399	100%

Table 2 indicates that out of the 399 students that participated in this study, 354(88.7%) recorded low writing performance, 45(11.3%) had an average performance, no student (0%) had a score for high writing performance based on the benchmark presented in chapter three. This implies that a greater percentage of the students involved in the study can be described as having low writing skills.

Hypotheses Testing

Ho1: *There is no significant relationship between secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of the students to reading materials and their performances in the writing test were collated and a comparison made. The output of the analysis reveals

Table 3: Relationship between Students' Extensive Reading Habit and Writing Performance

Variables	N	X	SD	df	r- value	Sig	Remark
Extensive Reading	399	57.11	6.74	770	0.89	0.77	Rejected
Writing Perf.	399	10.06	6.30				

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 3 shows the correlation between the extensive reading habit and writing performance of students. The data revealed a calculated r-value of 0.89 and a critical p-value of 0.77 computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r-value(0.89) is more than the critical p-value (0.77), hypothesis 1 is therefore rejected.

This implies that there was a significant relationship between secondary school students' extensive reading habit and their writing performance. A mean score of 57.11 was obtained in extensive reading, greater than the 10.06 obtained in the writing performance test.

Ho2: *There is no significant relationship between male secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of the male students to items on the questionnaire and their performance in the writing test were collated. The output of the analysis reveals:

Ho3: *There is no significant relationship between female secondary school students' extensive reading habit and their writing performance in Ilorin.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of the female students to items on the questionnaire and their performances in the writing test were collated. The output of the analysis reveals:

Table 5: Female Secondary School Students' Extensive Reading and Writing Performance

Variables	N	X	SD	df	r- value	Sig	Remark
Extensive Reading	242	56.58	6.54				
				640	-0.69	.313	Accepted
Writing Perf.	242	9.99					6.99

significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 5 shows the correlation between the extensive reading habit and writing performance of female students. The data revealed a calculated r-value of -.069 and a critical p-value of .313 computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r-value (-.069) is less than the critical p-value (.313), hypothesis 3 is therefore accepted.

This implies that there was no significant relationship between female students' extensive reading habit and writing performance. A mean score of 56.58 was obtained in extensive reading, greater than the 9.99 obtained in the writing performance test.

H_{O4}: *There is no significant relationship between private secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance in Ilorin.*

In order to test this hypothesis, responses of private school students to items on the questionnaire and their performances in the writing test were collated. The output of the analysis reveals:

Table 6: Private Secondary School Students' Extensive Reading Habit and Writing Performance

Variables	N	X	SD	df	r- value	Sig	Remark
Extensive Reading	242	57.03	6.59				
				682	-.068	.296	Accepted
Writing Perf.	242	9.19	5.81				

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 6 shows the correlation between the extensive reading habit and writing performance of private school students. The data revealed a calculated r-value of -.068 and

a critical p-value of .296 computed at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r-value (-.068) is less than the critical p-value (.296), hypothesis 4 is therefore accepted.

This implies that there was no significant relationship between private secondary school students' extensive reading habit and writing performance. A mean score of 57.03 was obtained in extensive reading, greater than the 9.19 obtained in the writing performance test.

Discussion

From the result, it was found that most of the students involved in the study have an ambivalent reading habit. Similarly, most of the students prefer reading their textbooks to any other material probably because they want to pass their examination. Also, it was found that students read other materials like religious books, jokes, text messages, news magazines and newspapers for other reasons such as religion, entertainment and information. The findings from this study confirm earlier studies such as Lawal (2005), Elumelu (2009) and Subashini and Balakrishnan (2013) which revealed that students with positive reading habits perform. This result is somewhat expected due to academic activities that require a significant amount of reading time in order to succeed academically. However, the amount of time spent on reading should be attributed to reading academic books rather than other materials such as newspapers or fictions.

Also, a greater percentage of students (88.7%) recorded low writing performance. The findings in this study revealed that majority of the students performed poorly in the Test of Reading Performance. Chen's (2002) and Gao's (2007) studies corroborate this finding. The study revealed that the decline in writing performance is due mainly to over-emphasis on linguistic accuracy rather than on communicative proficiency which positive extensive reading habit would have promoted.

In addition, there was a significant relationship between reading habit and writing performance of secondary school students in Ilorin. The finding of this study corroborated those of Olajide (1997 & 2010) and Lawal (2005) which revealed that students with positive reading habits in school performed better in school subjects than students with negative habits. These views crroborate the finding from this study that there was a significant relationship especially for students of secondary schools in Ilorin. The implication of this is that the link between reading and writing has not perhaps been appreciated by teachers and their students by extension.

Similar results were identified by Nonis and Hudson (2010) that positive study attitudes which are a driving force behind study habits should be adopted by the student in order to succeed. In studies comparing the study habits and attitudes of high and low-achieving students, data indicated that high achievers have better study habits and attitudes than the low achievers. This was confirmed in the present study. Students who acquired higher

study habits and attitudes scores have better performance. According to Fazal (2012), students with higher academic achievement used a wide range of study skills as compared to students with lower academic achievement.

Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between the extensive reading habit and the writing performance of male secondary school students in Ilorin. The finding of this present study seems to agree with that of Fakeye (2010) who found that males were more interested in reading than females.

The implication of this finding is that improved habit toward reading and higher literacy growth were seen for students who came in with good habit and strong reading comprehension skills; improvement and growth were also related to the amount of reading, both assigned and independent. In addition, it implied that gender differences, with males who have high level of reading comprehension and positive habit toward reading tended to benefit the most.

There was no significant relationship between the extensive reading habit and the writing performance of female secondary school students in Ilorin. Olajide's (1991) and Abe's (1995) findings which showed that girls possessed more favourable reading attitudes and performed better than boys with regard to recreational and academic reading.

Nor Shahriza and Amelia (2007) found that students' gender influenced their choice of reading materials. They found that male students spend a significant amount of time reading newspapers, academic books and websites. Also, the result indicates that the students are reading for leisure and not for educational purposes. Not surprising, they also reported that students tend to use electronic and IT resources more.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study predicted a relationship between extensive reading habit and writing performance in relation to some predictor variables like gender and school type. The results showed that a greater percentage of secondary school students in Ilorin have an ambivalent extensive reading habit. It also revealed that most secondary school students in Ilorin demonstrated low writing skill. Also, from the study, it was discovered that there was no significant relationship between reading habit and writing performance. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between reading habits and writing performance of students based on gender and school type.

Based on the findings and conclusions from this study, it was recommended that reading and writing activities at secondary school should be functional since formal education could end at this level. The Policy on Education should emphasize reading and writing. Reading should be included in other subjects not only in English language and Literature. Greater provision should be made for reading for pleasure and recreation.

It is recommended that teachers provide activities that will initiate, develop and sustain the link between reading and writing in students

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