

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN THE USE OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN THE WRITINGS OF NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

Gender variation in academic achievement has been a consistent discourse in the academia. This study investigates gender difference in the use of Nigerian in English in student's writings. It specifically determines whether there are differences in the use of Nigerian English in the writing of the Nigerian undergraduates based on gender. The study which employed the ex-post facto design comprised a sample of sixty (60) first year students drawn purposively from the faculties of Management Sciences and Engineering of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, Nigeria. The subjects consist of 32 males and 28 females who were also purposively selected. Data were generated through essay writing which was administered on the students as part of their in-course assessment for the university wide course, 'Communication in English', coded GST 111. The generated data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. The results of the study showed that there is a significant difference in the use of Nigerian English in the students writing based on gender with the male students using more of it. It was concluded that the male students do not conform to the standards of the target language in their writing as much as the females. Hence, continuous awareness creation about the need for students to conform to the target language standard in their writings was recommended.

Keywords: Nigerian English, gender difference, target language, native speaker, written English, second language.

Introduction

English has consistently played significant roles in every facet of the Nigerian society. Nigerians, being multilingual in nature, use English as a unifying language of communication. English also serves as a language of education. Apart from being a subject in the curriculum, all other subjects in the curriculum in the Nigerian educational system are taught and learnt in English. However, despite the obvious role English plays in Nigerian education, research has shown that Nigerian students perform poorly in English language (Amuseghan, 2007, Inigbenihi, 2018 & Ossai, 2019). Amadi, Nnamani and Ani (2022) noted that some of these scholars ascribe the reasons for such poor performance to errors in usage while others point at errors in language variation. This is confirmed by Ojetunde's (2013) report which avers that students' poor performance in English language in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination organized by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) is borne out of the fact that students use the dialect of English (Nigerian English), which is unacceptable to the examiners. The variety of English referred to

as Nigerian English differs from the British English at various levels of linguistic description (Amadi, Nnamani and Ani, 2022).

Nigerian English is the domesticated form of English used and accepted within the Nigerian multicultural and multilingual milieu. This variety of English is often reflected in the spoken and written English of Nigerian users of English as a second language. However, scholars attribute the use of this variety in the writings of second language learners as a source of error which is one of the causes for their poor performance in English language (Ojetunde, 2013 and Amuseghan and Tunde-Awe, 2016). Writing as a language skill mirrors the competence and proficiency of any language learner in the target language. Deng (2021), sees written English as an important means of measuring the English learning level of learners. Hence, writing is an index of what the learners have learnt or acquired in terms of vocabulary and grammar in the target language. Amadi, Nnamani and Ani (2022) argued that in spite of the importance of writing in language learning, learners are prone to mistakes and errors in their writing which contribute to their poor performance in English. The sources of these errors which have been attributed to mere errors in usage or nonconformity to the acceptable norm of measurement due to the use Nigerian English variety has been a source of concern to parents, language teachers/educators, curriculum planners, linguists, researchers and the general public. The use of the Nigerian English variety in the writings of Nigerian learners of English as a second language can be expressed on the basis of gender.

Gender is a sociocultural construct which refers to the concept of being male or female. Amadi and Offorma (2019) opine that gender describes the differences that exist between male and female with regards to their physique, roles and duties assigned to them socio-culturally. It also refers to the norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy as well as their relationships with each other (WHO, n.d.). Gender differences in diverse spheres of human society have been consistently reoccurring in academic discourse. Eze (2015) observes that distinctions between male and female are prominent in the area of language use. She further notes that women tend to perform better in the quick acquisition of language tool than men. According to her, in the area of language learning, women have the greater potentials to move closer to the native speaker of a language. This seems to be a reiteration of Holmes and Wilson's (2013) view that women favour the standard, correct and most prestigious form of the language of communication than men. A lot of studies have been conducted to either validate or invalidate these assertions.

The influence of gender on usage patterns of electronic information sources among undergraduates of selected universities in southwest, Nigeria was conducted by Olawale and Olubukola (2019). The findings of the study showed that there is no basis for gender differentiation in the use of electronic information sources as gender gap in electronic resources usage appeared negligible. In effect, there was no gender difference on the usage patterns of electronic information sources among Nigerian undergraduates. The study recommended that university libraries in Nigeria should continue to give equal opportunities to both sexes in terms of training and orientation on the use of e-resources among other recommendations.

A study of gender and area of specialization as determinants of University of Nigeria Undergraduates' Attitude towards the Use of English was examined by Eze (2015). The

purpose of the study was to determine the attitude of the University of Nigerian students towards the Use of English. The results of the study revealed that gender does not have influence on the attitude of the students towards the Use of English. She recommended that the students should be engaged in the evaluation of the course at the end of the semester as a proactive preventive measure against the development of apathy towards the subject. She further suggested the need for re-orientation and motivation of the students towards the course.

Gender-based attitude towards English language in Northern Nigeria was also investigated by Wayar (2017). The study explored the attitude of male and female students towards the learning and teaching of English language in four secondary schools in Gombe, Nigeria. The results of the study showed that gender played a significant role in second language learning as female learners developed a more positive attitude towards English than their male counterparts.

A study of the effect of mixed-gender streaming on students' performance in English language was conducted by Gwarjiko (2015). The study investigated the effect of mixed-gender streaming on the performance of senior secondary school students in English language in Niger State, Nigeria. The results of the study revealed that there was no significant difference in the performance of male and female students in English language through mixed-gender streaming though the female students performed better. The author, therefore, concluded that mixed-gender streaming was less effective in enhancing better academic performance especially in the English language in Niger State. The study of Abdullahi and Abdu Bichi (2015) on gender issues in students' academic achievement in English language showed a significant gender difference in students' performance in English language which also existed across school locations in favour of female students.

A study of gender variation in undergraduate students' achievement in English language was also conducted by Ossai (2019). The study specifically examined gender variation on Nigerian undergraduate students' achievement in Transformational generative grammar (ELS 301) in Delta State University, Abraka. The results of the study revealed that the female students had better mean achievement in ELS 301 though it was not significant. Hence, the researcher concluded that gender did not significantly influence the achievement of the students in the English language. Chime and Onyia (2022) further examined the effects of the functional-notional approach on male and female students' achievement in English grammar in Enugu Education Zone. The findings of the study indicated that the female students achieved slightly higher than their male counterpart though their mean achievement scores were not statistically significant. The researchers concluded that both male and female students were almost at par in their achievement in English grammar.

A study of the use of gendered English among high-ranking print journalists in selected reputable newspapers in Nigeria was conducted by Olarewaju and Babalola (2016). The study examined the Nigerian journalists' compliance with the global trend of the 21st century English language usage in carrying out their duties as journalists. The results of the study revealed that Nigerian newspapers still portray high degree of gender-bias expressions in their editorials, news, and features. The study further showed that both male and female journalists use gendered English expressions probably due to their ignorance of gender-fair

writing. The researchers suggested a continuous awareness creation about gender-neutral writing. Akingbade, Mayungbo and Osamika, (2022) also examined gender neutral language use among university lecturers with particular reference to gender differences in institutions with and without gender mainstreaming. The study specifically determined the main and interaction effects of gender and institution type on gender neutral language among public and private university lecturers. The results of the study indicated that gender differences and institution type interacted to influence gender neutral language use among the participants of the study. The authors concluded that gender and institution type are important in developing interventions for gender neutral language use in the academia.

From the above literature, it could be observed that much has not been done on gender difference in the use of Nigerian English in students' written English. The focus of Olawale and Olubukola's study was on gender difference on usage pattern of electronic information which differs from the focus of the present study. The studies of Eze and Wayar focused on gender differences in students' attitude towards English and so differ from the present study which examines gender difference in the use of Nigerian English in students' writing. They also differ from the present study in terms of population and subject of the study. Furthermore, the studies of Gwarjiko, Bichi, Ossai and Chime & Onyia differ from the present study as they investigated the influence of gender on students' academic achievement in English language while the present study is interested in gender variation in the students' use of Nigerian English in their written English. They also differ from the present study in terms of population and subjects of study. Olarewaju and Babalola as well as Akingbade, Mayungbo and Osamika's studies which focused on gender differences on the use of gendered English and gender-neutral language respectively also differ from the focus of the present study. Differences in population and subjects of study also exist. This creates a gap to be filled by the present study. Hence, the need for this study on gender difference in the use of Nigerian English in students' writing.

Statement of the Problem

The direction of research report on gender differences in language studies seems to be inconsistent. While some studies reported in favour of females, a good number of studies favoured males while others were neutral and non-directional. Again, most of the existing studies focused on gender-based attitudes towards language learning as well as gender differences in achievement in English language particularly at the post-primary school level. However, none has taken cognizance of gender difference in the use of Nigerian English in students' writing which is the concern of this study.

Research Questions

The results of the study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by male students in essay writing?
2. What is the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by female students in essay writing?
3. What is the difference in the mean rating score of Nigerian English used in students' essay writing based on gender?

Research Hypotheses

One hypothesis was formulated to guide the study.

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the use of Nigerian English in students' essay writing based on gender.

Methodology

This study employed an ex-post facto research design. Data were generated through the written essays of students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised sixty (60) first year students drawn purposively from the faculties of Engineering and Management Sciences. The subjects which comprised 32 males and 28 females were administered an English essay titled: "The sit-at-home order in South East Nigeria" as part of their in-course assessment for the university wide course, 'Communication in English', coded GST 111. All the students involved in the study were Igbo-English bilinguals who learnt English as a second language. The data generated from the essay were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics.

Results

Research Question One

What is the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by male students in essay writing?

Table 1: Mean and standard Deviation of Nigerian English used by male students

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
Female	32	4.19	1.71	High usage

Table 1 shows that the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by male students in their writing is 4.19 with a standard deviation of 1.71. This indicates that male students make use of quite a number of Nigerian English expressions in their writing.

Research Question Two

What is the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by female students in essay writing?

Table 2: Mean and standard Deviation of Nigerian English used by female students

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
Female	28	3.36	1.39	Moderate usage

Table 2 shows that the mean rating score of Nigerian English used by female students in their writing is 3.36 with a standard deviation of 1.39. This shows that female students moderately make use of Nigerian English expressions in their writing.

Research Question Three

What is the difference in the mean rating score of Nigerian English used in students' essay writing based on gender?

Table 3: Mean and standard Deviation of Nigerian English used in students' writing by gender?

Report		
	MALE	FEMALE
Mean	4.1875	3.3571
N	32	28
Std. Deviation	1.71215	1.39348

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation Nigerian English used in students' essay writing based on gender. The results reveal that male students had a mean rating score of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 1.17 while the female students had a mean rating score of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 1.39. The result indicates that the male students had a higher mean rating score in the use Nigerian English than their female counterpart. This shows that male students make use of more Nigerian English expressions in their writing than the female students.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the use of Nigerian English on the basis of gender.

Table 4: t-test on significant difference in the use of Nigerian English among students based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean	Sd	t cal	df	t critical	Decision
Male	32	4.19	1.712	2.332	58	1.684	Reject Ho
Female	28	3.36	1.393				

The result in table 4 was used to further validate the result in table 3. The result reveals that the calculated t value of 2.332 is greater the t critical (1.684); hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant difference in the use of Nigerian English on the basis of gender with the male students using more of it.

Discussion

The results of the study shown in table 1 indicated that the male students were rated high in the use of Nigerian English expressions in their writing. This shows that they make use of quite a number of Nigerian English expressions in their writings. This implies that the male students do not necessarily conform to the native speaker standard in their written English communication which could be one of the causes of students' poor performance in English language. This finding aligns with Ojetunde, 2013 and Amuseghan and Tunde-Awe 's (2016) view that the use of Nigerian English variety in the writings of second language learners constitutes a source of error which is one of the causes for their poor performance in English language. The finding is also an indication that male students do not pay particular attention to the differences between the target language and the Nigerian English variety.

The findings shown in table 2 revealed that the female students moderately used Nigerian English in their writing. This shows that the female students are conscious of the differences between the native speaker variety of English and the Nigerian English variety. In other words, they pay particular attention to the differences between the target language and the Nigerian English variety. Hence, they tend to move closer to the native speaker standard, which is the benchmark of assessment in their written English. This validates Eze's (2015) observation that women have the greater potentials to move closer to the native speaker of a language in the area of language learning. It also agrees with Holmes and Wilson's (2013) earlier assertion that women favour the standard, correct and most prestigious form of the language of communication than men.

The result shown in table 3 further revealed that male students make use of more Nigerian English expressions in their writing than the female students. This was further validated by

the results in table 4 which indicated that there is a significant difference in the use of Nigerian English variety in the students' writing based on gender. This implies that female students do better in the English language as they conform more to the native speaker standard which is the yardstick for measurement by examining bodies in Nigeria such as NECO and WAEC, and the entire Nigerian education system. The result is in tandem with the finding of Abdullahi and Abdu Bichi (2015) which showed a significant gender difference in students' performance in English language in favour of female students. It also aligns with the finding of Wayar (2017) who averred that gender played a significant role in second language learning in favour of female learners who developed more positive attitude towards English than their male counterparts. The use of Nigerian English by male students as reported in this study can also imply that they are not conscious of the differences between Nigerian English and the target language variety. It could also imply that they are just being natural in their language use without taking cognisance of the context of use.

However, the result of the present study negates the finding of Eze (2015) which reported that gender has no influence on the attitude of students towards the Use of English. The finding is also at variance with the studies of Gwarjiko (2015), Ossai (2019) and Chime and Onyia (2022). Gwarjiko found that there was no significant difference in the performance of male and female students in English language through mixed-gender streaming. Ossai also discovered that gender did not significantly influence the achievement of students in English language. Chime and Onyia further reported that both male and female students were almost at par in their achievement in English grammar. The reports of these scholars indicate a tendency towards closing the age long gender gap in language learning in favour of females. However, based on the findings of this study the female students show more potential towards applying the rules of the target language in their language learning. They also prove to be more conscious of the differences between the native speaker variety of English and the Nigerian English variety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence from this study proves that there is a significant gender difference in the use of Nigerian English variety in students' writing. This claim is supported by the fact that male students used more Nigerian English expressions in their writing than the female students. Therefore, it can be said that they do not conform to the standards of the target language in their writing as much as the female students. To remedy this situation, it is recommended that teachers of 'Communication in English' in Nigerian universities should put more effort in bringing to the awareness of the students the need to conform to the target language standard in their writings. It is also suggested that the same study should be replicated in other universities for more generalisability.

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