



GENDER VARIATION IN READING HABITS IN SCHOOLS IN MOLAND, GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF ASANTEKWAA S.D. A. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract:

The paper sought to investigate gender variation in reading habits in schools in Moland: using Asantekwaa S.D. A. Junior High School in the Kintampo Municipality of Ghana as a case study. Questionnaires were used to collect data from one hundred and forty - four (144) students who were randomly selected for the study. The findings disclosed that female students had a more positive attitude towards reading than their male counterparts. The study recommended that teachers should draw programmes that will attract and encourage students to engage in effective reading habits. The school management and parents association should harness resources to set up a library in the school since a library is part of a school system which serves as a storehouse of knowledge.

Keywords: gender variations, Ghana, junior high, Moland, reading habit

1. Introduction

Reading plays a pivotal role in all spheres of academic levels such as Primary, Junior High, Senior High, and Tertiary Institutions. Effective and good reading practices empower one to stand tall in public when reading to one's audience. Reading brings about creativity and helps develop the creative side of the brain as it introduces innovation into the thinking process of an individual. The habit of reading builds the

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vocabulary of the reader by exposing him or her to new words and phrases which allow him /her to write and speak better since reading proficiency is the key to knowledge.

In modern life, reading depends on the individual's capacity to interpret printed pages fully and accurately. Reading has personal values: it is the door to almost all vocations such that the mechanical worker on the factory floor needs to read some basic material like rules and regulations governing operations on the factory floor. He or she has to read signs, obey rules and regulations. Failure to read can lead to industrial accidents.

Many industrial accidents have been attributed to the inability of personnel to read. It is important for reading skills to be taught right from primary school to enable everybody to have an appreciable reading ability. Readers find consolation in books when they are sad or faced with problems because books are full of numerous consolatory words. Recreational reading can provide enough hours of varied amusement. When one is reading a story purely for pleasure, the tendency is to be more relaxed with an uneven speed. Recreational reading can provide insight into the behaviour of other people. Reading takes the reader on journeys into unknown parts of the world and also allows the reader to share the experiences of people throughout history.

A work carried out by the International Reading Association (Moore et al., 1999) that has been cited in Clark and Rumbold (2006), states that: *"Adolescence entering the grown-up world in the 21st Century will read and compile more than at any other time in mankind's history. They will call for various levels of education to play out their jobs, run their family units, act as subjects, and direct their own lives. They will require proficiency to adapt to the flow of data they will discover wherever they turn. They will require proficiency to sustain their creative energies so they can make the universe without limits"*.

Also, a research study by the Canadian Council on learning (2009) reports that *"boys' gendered attitude towards reading keeps them from reading as frequently as girls"*. Males and females exhibit different states of mind towards reading, some of which may be a direct result of the distinctive reading inclinations that every gender possesses. In light of this gender dissimilarity, it is essential to see how males and females select books based on their interests and capacities, which thus can propel them to become better readers.

Özbay (2006) reports that an individual's reading preference differs in terms of interest, thought, aptitudes, and condition. Reading interest, curiosity, or preference is by all accounts diverse with males and females having distinctive reading propensities and reading aptitudes to such an extent that females appreciate reading more than males. Dilshad, Adnan, and Akram (2013) investigated gender differences in the reading habits of university students and concluded that reading habits of male and female students were somewhat different which is in line with the findings of Frankenstein (2009) which disclosed that boys and girls have distinctive options with regards to reading. Shafi and Loan (2010) revealed that gender is a central point affecting students' reading habits and that female students are superior to male students in terms of reading habits.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

One of the upsetting phenomena in Ghanaian formal education today is the poor reading habit of students in Junior High Schools. The researchers observed that there is a variation between boys and girls with respect to their reading habits. This variation causes a gap in gender participation in academic activities at Asantekwaa S.D.A. Junior High School and in general Junior High Schools in Moland. No research has been conducted on gender variation in reading habits in Junior High Schools in Moland and particularly at Asantekwaa S.D.A. Junior High School.

However, the few related studies on this subject were conducted elsewhere by Ladipo & Gbotosho (2015) in Nigeria; Dilshad, Adnan & Akram (2013) in Pakistan, and in Ghana by Acheaw and Larson (2014). It is against this backdrop that the present study was carried out to investigate gender variations in reading habits of Junior High School students, to fill the gap created.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate gender variation in reading habits among Junior High School students in Moland and in particular at Asantekwaa Junior High School in Kintampo North District.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were:

- a) To find out gender attitudes towards reading
- b) To investigate the frequency of gender engagement in reading
- c) To examine the material students read
- d) To find out the factors militating against reading habits

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Attitude towards Reading

Clark and Foster (2005) found out that female students have a more positive mind than their male counterparts towards reading. They established that male students read extra to get an enviable job in future while female students read for entertainment.

Iqbal and Shehzadi (2002) in a study in Pakistan revealed that female students lacked healthy study habits as well as effective reading skills. Reading habit is a key ingredient in the life of a student since it can leave a positive effect on the student. Acquisition of knowledge is imperative in the life of an individual and it must be useful knowledge that encourages a male or female to get on in a profession or pass an examination.

Clark, Torsi and Strong (2005) reported in their studies that males and females have infinitely different reading interests. The findings of Bas (2012) on reading attitudes of high school students reported that students express a significant difference according to gender variable in favour of female students. Researches from the United States, England, and Australia have suggested that boys are less likely than girls to read

for leisure or academics as they grow into their teenage years (Love & Hamston, 2003).

Pillai (2012) supports this by stating that there is a major difference in the study habits of male and female students. Research studies carried out by various researchers also revealed that more female students do better academically than their male counterparts and that they (females) acquire good study habits and attitudes (Tinklin, 2003; Hong & Lee, 2000; Anton & Angel, 2004; Houtte, 2004; Sud & Sujatha, 2006)

The studies of Gambell and Hunter (1999), Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy (2003), Meece, Glienke, & Burg (2006) opine that females and males vary in terms of reading habits, attitudes and also measure of inspiration. According to them, females normally exhibit a positive attitude towards reading, self-concept and involve themselves regularly in reading practices outside the school environment.

Both national and international findings on reading habits among males and females disclosed that females have more reading achievement than their male counterparts (Wagemaker, 1996; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez & Kennedy, 2003; Perie, Grieg, & Donahue, 2006). Similarly, Moyes (2000) reiterates that male students spend the majority of their time in sporting activities while females spend much of theirs in reading. Bozak (2011; Logan & Johnston, 2009, 2010; Lai, 2010; Watson et al., 2010; Below et al., 2010; Statistique Canada, 2010) stated in their studies that females are good readers and as a result are likely to have more scores on reading test than their male counterparts. Logan and Johnston (2009, 2010) highlighted that females use various reading methods differently and are more active in reading than males do.

2.2 Frequency of Students Engagement in Reading

Szarina (1995) did a study on reading habits and interests among students in Malaysia High Learning Institutions including Institute of Teknologi MARA and Tunku Abdul Rahman College, and the results showed that the majority of the respondents representing 64.4% read newspapers daily, followed by 45.4% who read lecture notes daily. The respondents also read general knowledge books or non - fiction books between 1-3 days in a month. It was reported that the respondents read textbooks, magazines, journals between 1 - 3 days in a week. Shen (2006) investigated 124 students on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a University in Southern Taiwan, and it was found out that 83.9% of the students read online information often every day, followed by 31.4% who read newspapers and 33.1% read magazines often every day.

The work of Nestle Family Monitor (2003) on Public School across England, Wales revealed that 83% of the students read books during their free time, while 16% read books every day. Another 11 % of the respondents indicated that they never read books after the close of school.

Moradman (2010) carried out a study on factors contributing to preventing leisure reading focused on male and female students in Teacher Training Universities of Azerbaijan. The findings indicated that students read 30 minutes per day for pleasure on the average.

Su-Yen Chen (2007) investigated the extracurricular reading habits of college students in Taiwan and found out that male students spent more average time on extracurricular reading more than their female counterparts.

The National Endowments Arts (2007) reported that in the United States of America, 15-24 year old students in high schools and colleges spend 7 minutes reading on weekdays while 10 minutes on weekends on the average. In contrast, they spend 2 ½ hours per day watching television (NEA Report, 2007).

2.3 Materials Students Read

Acheaw and Larson (2014) studied reading habits among students and its effect on academic performance at Koforidua Polytechnic in Ghana. Their study reported that 62.5% of the respondents read novels or fiction books, followed by 14.9%, who indicated that they learnt new things. Another 10.1% hinted that it was for the imagination of things, 8.5% revealed that reading complemented their studies and 4% reported that reading kept them from becoming bored. Again, 62.0% of the respondents highlighted that they read lecture notes when they visited the library facility, while 25.0% said they read textbooks.

Azura (2006) undertook a study on reading habits and interests among the students of the Faculty of Information Management in Universiti Teknologi Mara. The results revealed that 30% of the respondents like to read topics on entertainment, followed by 18% who enjoyed reading materials on technology, 17% read on sports, another 15% read religious materials. According to the findings, minority of the students read politics with 6% and 1% read engineering materials. On the kind of materials, it was disclosed that 27% of the respondents read newspapers, 21% read academic books, while 17% enjoy reading magazines, followed by 16% who read comics and 14% read novels.

Annamali and Muniandy (2013) did a similar study on reading habits and attitudes among Malaysian Polytechnic Students. Their findings reported that 68.9% of the respondents read newspapers daily for at least a few times and 57.1% read magazines. The authors drew their conclusions based on the findings that Polytechnic students do not have much interest in reading as much as they like engaging themselves in other technology-based activity. Croston (2005) confirmed in his study that students are interested in reading famous story books, books containing scary stories, mystery and other popular stories outside school environments.

In the views of Williams (2008 a; Davila & Patrick, 2010) females have a much greater preference for reading fiction books, romantic stories as well as stories on pets. Shelley-Robinson (2001a) results were similar to that of Williams (2008 b; Davila & Patrick, 2010) studies which indicated that female students usually prefer stories that involved romance, family issues, adult, social empathy, song lyrics, poetry and interpersonal relationships. According to them, females like reading funny, frightening and adventure-based fiction stories more than their male counterparts.

Shelley-Robinson (2001b) opined that informational materials and books that occasionally exhibit aggressive behaviour, physical activities among characters, and

much expectation is chosen by male students. Again, males are always anxious to read books that pertain to war, sporting events, adventure, science, machines, and inventions. Atkinson (2006 a) highlighted that reasons for male students' interests are unknown but might be ascribed to the specific choice that male students possess.

Williams (2008 b) asserted that females like reading books that portray prominent African leaders and their characters; according to the author these females were twice as likely as males to select these books.

Farris et al. (2009; Williams, 2008 c; Duthie, Larsen & Nippold, 2005) concurred in their various studies that males like to read comic strips, magazines, frightening stories, books containing facts, brief passages that were held by either photographs or cartoon pictures.

2.4 Factors Militating Against Students Reading Habits

Below, Skinner, Fearington and Sorell's (2010) study revealed that environmental condition, cultural, socio-economic status and family influence are factors that influence gender differences as regards reading achievements. Scale and Rhee (2001) reported that students' gender, race, and educational background are the factors that determine reading habit and pattern. Shah and Saleem (2010) listed some challenges as low literacy rate, lack of reading culture, poor educational system, lack of well-stocked library and lack of serene reading environment.

It is generally assumed that the socioeconomic status of parents is a major player in students' academic performance. Suleman, Aslam, Shakir, Akhtar, Hussain, Akhtar,(2012) stressed that parental socioeconomic level, educational background, profession and income level affect the academic performance of students at the secondary school level. Rajendra et al. (2009) examined the nature of the family, and discovered that extended and nuclear do not have an important influence on students reading habits with regard to home condition, note-taking, planning as well as focusing and general study habits.

The study of Haugh (2004) reported that *"poor literacy skills, cultural factors, peer influence, inadequate supplies of suitable reading material, an overloaded curriculum and the constant competition from multi-channel television and the World Wide Web (WWW) are only a few of the many factors that militated against the idea of children reading for pleasure"*.

The study carried out by Shelley-Robinson (2001c) revealed that the geographical location of a student could also have an adverse effect on his or her reading habit and stressed further that this challenge might be ascribed to Jamaica being a developing nation which had inadequate resources to acquire books.

Atkinson (2006 b) study identified some factors that militate students' reading habits as family pressure, early literacy experiences, peer group pressures, stereotyping, classroom environments, parents anticipations, some behavioural challenges and the availability of literacy materials. *"Poor reading skill can make a child develop a poor attitude to school and it can create self-esteem problems later in life"* (Fosudo, 2010).

The association with peer groups through exchange and sharing of story books emerged to be an essential ingredient that promote reading among peers and provide

students with a chance to support one another through the reading practices which will develop their overall reading habits (Andrea & Nelson-Royes, 2012).

Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) asserted that library facilities, teacher support, and peer influence were reported to have an adverse effect on the reading habit of students.

3. Methodology

The researchers adopted a survey design for this study. The questionnaires were the data collection instrument. The entire population for the study comprised J.H.S1, J.H.S2, and J.H.S3 students. The simple random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and forty-four (144) participants from the population of one hundred and fifty-six (156) students. Out of 144 questionnaires administered, one hundred and thirty-eight (138) were retrieved and used for the study, thus, representing a 95.8% response rate.

4. Results and Discussions

The request for respondents to indicate their gender and age revealed the results as shown in Figure 1.

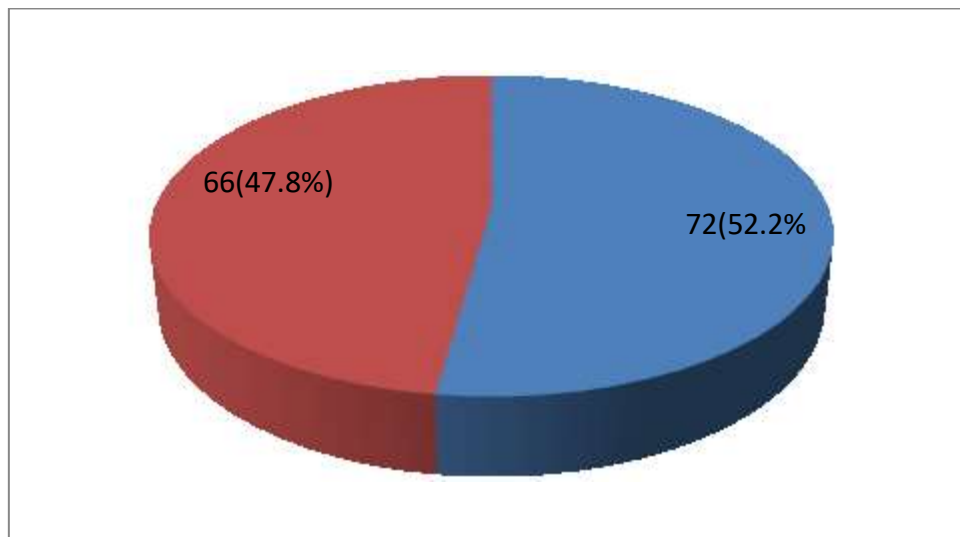


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents
(Source: Field data, 2017)

From Figure 1 above, the results revealed that 72 (52.2%) respondents were males, while 66 (47.8%) were females who participated in the study.

4.1 Gender Attitude towards Reading

When the researchers sought to find out gender attitude towards reading habits, Table 1 below revealed that 30 (41.7%) of the male respondents had a positive attitude towards reading, however 33 (50%) female respondents had a greater positive attitude towards reading than their male counterparts, while 20.8% of the male respondents and 9.1% of their female respondents remained neutral to the question.

It can be concluded that female students had a greater positive attitude towards reading than their male counterparts. The present study agrees to that of Gambell and Hunter (1999; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003; Meece, Glienke, & Burg (2006) which established that females normally exhibit a positive attitude towards reading, self-concept and involve themselves regularly in reading practices outside the school environment.

Table 1: Gender Attitude towards Reading

Responses	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	30	41.7	33	50
Negative	27	37.5	27	40.9
Neutral	15	20.8	6	9.1
Total	72	100	66	100
Grand Total	138			

Source: Field data, 2017.

4.2 Frequency of Gender Engagement in Reading

The study also investigated how frequently different genders engage in reading habits. The findings reported that 54 (75%) male engage in reading practices “always”, followed by 13.9% who read “rarely”.

On the part of females, out of 66 respondents, 46 (69.7%) responded to “always”, while 10.6% females indicated “rarely”. In general, male students practise reading more frequently than their female counterparts, as shown in Table 2 below.

This finding is not in line with the study of Shen (2006) who did a study with 124 students on English, as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a University in Southern Taiwan.

It was found out that 83.9% of the students read online information often every day, followed by 31.4% who read newspapers and 33.1% read magazines often every day.

Table 2: Frequency of Gender Engagement in Reading

Responses	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	54	75	46	69.7
Often	8	11.1	13	19.7
Rarely	10	13.9	7	10.6
Total	72	100	66	100
Grand Total	138			

Source: Field data, 2017.

4.3 Materials Students Read

When the researchers sought to find out the type of materials the respondents liked reading frequently, the findings reported that out of 72 male respondents, 28(38.9%) liked reading textbooks frequently, followed by 26.4% who read novels/fiction and 19.4% read newspapers, while lecture notes representing 5.6% and magazines representing 9.7% were the least read materials by male students.

On the contrary, out of 66 female respondents, 23(34.8%) read textbooks frequently, followed by 30(45.5%) who read novels/fiction frequently while 9.1% read newspapers. Another 6.1% and 4.5% read lecture notes and magazines respectively. The deduction was that most of the female respondents read novels/ fiction more frequently than their male counterparts, as depicted in Table 3 below. This finding agrees to that of Williams (2008; Davila & Patrick; 2010) which disclosed that females had a preference for reading fiction books, romantic stories as well as stories on pets.

Table 3: Materials Students Read

Responses	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)
Textbooks	28	38.9	23	34.8
Novel/fictions	19	26.4	30	45.5
Newspapers	14	19.4	6	9.1
Lecture Notes	4	5.6	4	6.1
Magazines	7	9.7	3	4.5
Total	72	100	66	100
Grand Total	138			

Source: Field data, 2017.

4.4: Factors Militating Against Reading Habits

The respondents were asked to indicate factors that militate against their reading habits. Interestingly, the findings from Table 4 below disclosed that 41(56.9%) of the male respondents as well as 38 (57.6%) female respondents were of the view that the lack of library facilities prevented them from reading. The analysis stressed further that 11(15.3%) of male respondents and 13(19.7%) of female respondents indicated house chores.

This finding confirms the study of Shah and Saleem (2010) whose study revealed that the lack of a well-stocked library, serene reading environment as well as low literacy rate were considered as factors militating against the development of reading habits. Other significant challenges include the lack of reading culture, poor educational system and inadequate motivational package for library staff.

Table 4: Factors Militating Against Reading Habits

Factors	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of library facilities	41	56.9	38	57.6
Sporting Activities	9	12.5	5	7.6
House Chores	11	15.3	13	19.7
Long extra classes	8	11.1	6	9.1
Laziness	3	4.2	4	6
Total	72	100	66	100
Grand Total	138			

Source: Field data, 2017.

5. Conclusion

The study was set up to investigate gender variations in reading habits among students of Moland with a particular focus on Asantekwaa S.D.A Junior High School students. The findings revealed that both male and female students have a positive attitude towards reading habits, although there is a slight variation in reading habit among male and female students. In contrast, male students engage in reading more frequently than their female counterparts. The study also reports that the majority of male students like reading textbooks while female students like reading novels/fiction.

Interestingly, the findings disclosed that both male and female students indicate that the lack of library facilities in the school prevent them from acquiring reading habits.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the recommendations below were made to improve students' reading habits. To ensure that students improve upon their reading habits, the school should introduce reading programmes such as reading week, reading competition, storytelling hours and spelling-bee competition.

Teachers should draw programmes that will attract and encourage students to engage in effective reading habits. Parents should not engage students in excessive house chores but rather encourage them to get involved in active reading practices.

Parents should provide students with relevant reading materials that will engage them in reading and also prevent them from spending too many hours on television watching or roaming.

Finally, the role of a school library cannot be overlooked. The school management and parents association should harness resources to set up a library in the school since a library is part of the school system, which serves as a store house of knowledge.

It is also recommended that the new library should be well-stocked with appropriate varieties of books that will serve the reading needs of the students at all levels and such books should be made available to all students.

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