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Influence of Gender Difference on Reading Habit and Academic Achievement of Undergraduate Medical Students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which gender difference determine the reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students of University of Ibadan. Questionnaire was used to collect data from four hundred and twenty nine medical students randomly selected from the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed gender difference in the academic achievement of medical students in favour of male students. On the other hand, there was no gender difference in the reading habit of medical students. Findings on relationships between gender and academic achievement established a positive relationship just as a positive relationship was established between reading habit of medical students and their academic achievement. The study recommended the need for school authorities to work towards ensuring that the gender gap in the academic achievement of medical students is bridged while library and information resources should be provided to encourage development of favorable reading culture among the medical students.

Keyword: Gender difference, Reading habit, Academic achievement

Background to the study

Academic achievement is very important in any educational setting, as it indicates the level of students' competence in respect of the academic content. This is typically defined in terms of performance, and grades which represent the most obvious and universally accepted indicator of academic achievement in educational contexts. Indeed, academic achievement does create competition among students, and it may remove the focus from the academic content of a course, but it is a prerequisite in order to obtain success at university, and equally important in life after university (Harackiewicz, Barron and Elliot, 1998). The academic achievement of students determines whether he or she is considered to be successful or not, and as a result, academic achievement is very important in education.

One of the most topical issues in the current debate all over the world has been that of gender differences and academic achievement among students in schools. Hence, it is crucial to know and to understand which factors are responsible for determining, predicting or for causing variance in academic achievement. Fergusson and Horwood (1997) reported pervasive differences in the school achievement of males and females with males having lower scores on all standardised tests; being uniformly rated as performing less well in the areas of reading, written expression, mathematics and spelling, and at age 18, having lower success rates in School Certificate examinations, higher rates of reading delay and more often leaving school without qualifications. According to them, the consistently poorer academic achievement of males was due to the fact that males were cognitively less able than females.

Abdu-Raheem (2012) in his study on gender differences and students' academic achievement reported that there was no significant difference between the achievement mean scores of male and female student in the experimental and control groups. This is an indication that gender has no significant contribution to the achievement of student.

On the other hand, variation in reading between male and female students has also been found to have implications on their academic achievement. Reading habit according to Orasamu (1982) as cited by Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe and Adedeji (2012) refers to the art of interpreting printed and written words. Greene (2001) is of the opinion that reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed it can last one's life. Once a child has been taught to read and develop love for books, he or she can explore for himself or herself the wealth of human experience and knowledge. Children, missing the opportunity of getting in touch with books at this stage, find it hard to acquire good reading habit in their later years. According to Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe and Adedeji (2012) reading habit is an intellectual action which is possible only if a man has formed the habit of reading and practicing it since childhood.

The reading habit refers to the frequency of reading, and the average time spent on reading materials. Cleary cited in Abeyrathna (2004) stated that an individual's interest is determined to a considerable extent by the amount of reading materials he will read and the intensity with which he will pursue his reading activity. By reading books, one gets confirmation or rejection of one's own ideas, which makes one think more critically about right and wrong in the society (Bergland in Abeyrathna, 2004). Nonetheless, Bas (2012) emphasized a favourable reading habit as a prerequisite for a healthy intellectual growth and plays a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency. Bas (2012) established through his findings that, reading habit of high school students showed a significant difference according to gender variable in favour of female students.

Similarly, according to Okebukola (2004), through acquiring good reading habit, humans possess the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation. Besides, it allows one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages. This is emphasized by many different religious traditions. Reading habit is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. The individual who reads well has a means for widening mental horizons and for multiplying opportunities of success. For an undergraduate student to be successful in his studies, he/she needs to acquire efficient reading habit. She/he needs not only to read more materials but also to

learn how to do so with great comprehension. A student is expected to read very widely and at the same time be able to reproduce much of what he/she has read.

Reading, a lifelong habit, is the major source of access to the knowledge. It is taken as an implicit practice that supports an individual to achieve original power and develops one's critical thinking capability. Reading habit, thus, is considered as an essential means for the development of personal traits, mental abilities, getting knowledge, information and understanding of an individual (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). According to Özbay (2006), individual reading preferences differ in terms of interest, attention, aptitude and situation. Reading interest, curiosity or inclination seems to be different with boys and girls having different reading habits and reading aptitudes such that girls enjoy reading more than boys. Clark and Foster (2005) are of the view that girls prove to be more positive than boys towards reading. But in school years, boys read more for getting a good job in future while girls read for fun and for some break. Gender and background have an effect on reading abilities of students. Reading habit is essential and it can leave a positive impact on all age groups. Gaining knowledge is a good way, but it must be constructive knowledge, it must facilitate a man to get on in a profession and pass an examination. Dilshad, Adnan and Akram (2013) investigated gender differences in reading habits of university students and reported that reading habits of male and female students are somewhat different which is in consistent with the results of Frankenstein's (2009) study, who stated that boys and girls have different choices when it comes to reading. Shafi and Loan (2010) also found that gender was major factor impacting students' reading habits and female students were better than male students in reading culture.

Moreover, studies have shown that girls and boys differ in their reading attitudes and other measures of motivation, with girls typically having more positive attitudes toward reading, demonstrating more positive reading self-concept, and engaging more often in reading activities outside of school (Gambell & Hunter, 1999; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003; Meece, Glienke, & Burg, 2006). These differences have often been cited as explanation of national and international results showing that girls have higher reading achievement than boys (Wagemaker, 1996; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez & Kennedy, 2003; Perie, Grieg, & Donahue, 2005). While boys and girls differ in many of their reading habits and behaviors, these differences tend to be smaller within the top-achieving group, with the gap between boys and girls increasing within the low-achieving group. It is apparent from these results that the bottom third of the boys' achievement distribution are at a more serious disadvantage than bottom-achieving girls, both in terms of their average reading achievement and their reading habits and attitudes (Kennedy, 2010).

The gender of the student may also be a factor in determining student performance. Dayioglu and Turut-Asik (2004) in their study of gender differences in academic achievement in a large public university in Turkey reported a high gender disparity in various spheres of public life and the patriarchal social structure in Turkey as a major factor that may lead to poorer academic performance among female university students.

The debate on gender differences in cognitive abilities has actually evolved out of the debate on biological vs. social determinism. The biological perspective on sex differences and cognitive performance considers social factors to be trivial or subordinate to biological factors like brain

structure. Lynn in several of his studies (Lynn, 1999; Allik, Must and Lynn, 1999; Colom and Lynn, 2004) asserted that males have larger average brain sizes than females and therefore, would be expected to have higher average Intelligent Quotients. Mackintosh (1998), on the other hand, claims that there is no sex difference in general intelligence. Mackintosh proposes that general intelligence should be defined as reasoning ability and that the best measure of this is the Progressive Matrices.

This study therefore seeks to investigate gender differences in reading habit and academic achievement of university students in selected federal universities in south-west, Nigeria. This study finds relevance in the growing literature on demographic variables determining reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate students in Nigeria and consequently proffer solution to gender disparities associated with reading habit and academic achievement of university students in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate gender differences in reading habit and academic achievement of university students in selected federal universities in south-west, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. find out if there is gender difference in the academic achievement of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria;
2. find out if there is gender difference in the reading habit of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria;
3. examine the relationship between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria; and
4. examine the relationship between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria.

Research questions

The following questions were answered in this study:

1. Is there any gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria?
2. Is there any gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate students in federal universities in south-west, Nigeria?
3. What relationship exists between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate students in universities in South-West, Nigeria?
4. What relationship exists between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate students in universities in South-West, Nigeria?

Research Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprises one thousand seven hundred and eighteen (1,718) 300 and 400 level undergraduate medical students in the College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The other levels (500-600 levels) students were exempted because majority of them are unavailable at the time of collecting data for this study due to their involvement in other important academic activities relating to their programmes. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 25.0%

of the total population of medical students under study. Thus, 429 undergraduate medical students were selected for the study.

Questionnaire and records of academic achievement of undergraduate medical students were the major instruments of data collection adopted for this study. The record of academic achievement contains results of the undergraduate medical students which reflected their cumulative grade point average. This is aimed at having information on the academic achievement of the students.

The questionnaire was given to the experts in the fields of library and information studies for content validity. Their inputs on the adequacy and appropriateness of the items were recorded to determine the content validity ratio of the instrument. Also, the questionnaires were trial-tested on some undergraduate medical students at Obafemi Awolowo University who were not part of the respondents selected for the study. This was to ensure the reliability of the instruments.

Discussion of Findings

A total of 429 copies of questionnaire were administered on the undergraduate students out of which only 378 were returned with useful responses. This gives a response rate of 88.1% which is considered adequate for this study. Therefore, the analysis and presentation of results were based on the 378 useful responses received.

Research question 1: Is there any gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 1: Summary of Gender Difference in Academic Achievement of Medical Students

Sex of Respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	Sig
Academic achievement Male	244	3.36	1.235	.056	.003
Female	134	3.11	1.195	.062	

Information gathered from Table 1 revealed a significant mean difference in the academic achievement of undergraduate medical students at the University of Ibadan in favour of the male students (Mean = 3.36, $p > 0.05$). This is suffice to say that male undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan perform better than their female counterparts.

Research question 2: Is there any gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of Gender Difference in Reading Habit of Medical Students

Sex of Respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	Sig
Reading habit Male	202	1.94	0.674	.031	.816
Female	176	1.93	0.667	.035	

Table 2 presents information on gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan. It revealed a non-significant difference in the reading habit of both male (Mean = 1.94, $p < 0.05$) and female (Mean = 1.93, $p < 0.05$) undergraduate medical

students in University of Ibadan. This implies that there is no difference in the reading habit of both male and female undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan,

Research question 3: What relationship exists between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 3: Summary of Relationship Between Reading Habit and Academic Achievement of Medical Students

Variables	χ	SD	r	r ²	P	Remark
Reading habit	1.93	.671	.007	.000	.843	Not Sig
Academic achievement	3.25	1.223				

Correlation Significant at *p<0.01 level

Table 3 presents information on the relationship between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan and it revealed that there is a weak positive relationship and non-significant relationship between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students ($r = .007$, $p > 0.05$). It can therefore be inferred that reading habit of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan does not have any effect on their academic achievement. This is also supported with the information that for every one level increase in the reading habit of the students no increase was recorded in the academic achievement of undergraduate students ($r^2 = .000$).

Research question 4: What relationship exists between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan?

Table 4: Summary of Relationship Between Gender and Academic Achievement of Medical Students

Variables	χ	SD	r	r ²	P	Remark
Gender	1.43	.496	.101	.010	.003	Sig
Academic achievement	3.25	1.001				

Correlation Significant at *p<0.01 level.

Information gathered from Table 4 revealed a weak positive relationship between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan ($r = .101$, $p < 0.05$) which implies that gender of medical students could determine their academic achievement.

Discussion of findings

Findings from the study revealed a significant difference in the academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in favour of male medical students. This finding is in support of Dayioglu and Turut-Asik (2004) which reported a higher gender disparity in academic achievement of students in a large public university in Turkey but at variance with Abdu-Raheem (2012) study which reported that there was no significant difference in the mean scores

of male and female students. On the gender difference in reading habit of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan, finding from the study revealed no significant difference in reading habit of both male and female medical students which is at variance with findings from Dilshad, Adnan and Akram (2013) study on gender differences in reading habits of university students which reported that reading habits of male and female students are somewhat different and that of Shafi and Loan (2010) who also found that gender was major factor impacting students' reading habits and that female students were better than male students in reading culture.

Findings on relationship between reading habit and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students revealed a positive relationship which implies that favourable reading habit could lead to improve academic achievement among undergraduate medical students. This finding corroborates findings from Premalakshmi (2012) study which reported that there is a significant and positive relationship between students' academic achievement and reading habit such that for every one level increase in reading habit, 9% increase in academic achievement is attained and Gallik (1999) which reported a significant and positive relationship between students' cumulative grade-point average and time spent reading for pleasure during vacations. On the other hand Sheorey and Mokhtari (1994) indicated that there is no significant difference between high and low proficient readers with regard to amount of time spent reading academic or nonacademic materials.

Furthermore, findings from this study revealed a weak positive relationship between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan which is at variance with Mushtak and Khan (2012) study which reported that gender has no significant relationship with academic achievement of students but in support Raychaudhury, Debnath, Sen and Majumder (2010) findings which reported that gender of students determines their academic achievement.

Summary and Conclusion

The conclusion that could be derived from this study is that there is gender disparity in the academic achievement of undergraduate medical students while there is no gender disparity in the reading habits of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan, A positive relationships were established between reading habits and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students as well as between gender and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in University of Ibadan. This is a pointer to the fact that gender of medical students should be given priority in improving reading habits and academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in Universities in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Education stakeholders and University authorities should focus on provision of enabling environment to ensure that the gap in academic achievement of undergraduate medical students in medical schools is bridged to ensure that female students perform as equally as their male counterparts.
2. There is also the need for authorities of university libraries to engage in continuous orientation to draw the attention of the medical students to library resources available for

use within and/or outside the library environment so that the students would be aware of these resources and ultimately use them. Observations have revealed that students are not aware of what is available through the library most times. This can help in improving their reading culture.

3. Workshops and seminars should also be organized by medical school libraries to train students on how to access and make use of library resources and facilities to improve their reading habits which would ultimately lead to improved academic performance of undergraduate students. .
4. University authorities should also facilitate programmes to ensure that students perform better in their academics.

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