

Teaching Speaking and Writing Skills: Determinants for Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Nigeria

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Abstract

Speaking and Writing are two crucial productive skills that must be taught to every student in order to enjoy a fulfilled academic experience. They are the backbone of every effective and efficient communication in schools and every other area of human endeavors. This study investigates the teaching of speaking and writing as crucial skills and determinants for academic performance of secondary school students in Ilorin, Kwara State. Descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The population comprised all students and teachers in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. For the purpose of collecting relevant information, questionnaires were carefully designed for one hundred (100) students throughout the selected senior secondary schools in Ilorin and the data collected were analyzed using frequency count and percentage while the hypotheses were tested using independent t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that, good speaking and writing skills trigger increase in the level of performance of students in Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. More so, the various methods used by teachers such as: speaking and writing activities, debates, public speaking, dialogue classes, speeches and talks in and outside the class; narrative activities; tell interesting stories or favorite movies were identified as effective methods used by teachers which have great influence on students ability to speak and write effectively in school. The findings also revealed that; there is no statistically significant difference in speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on academic performance of students based on their ages, gender and classes.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Language Skills, Speaking, Writing

Introduction

English language in Nigeria is majorly used for communication and instruction. It is a global language. Just like every other language, English has four language skills which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are called receptive skills while speaking and writing are called productive skills. Though, the speaking and writing skills are developed from a strong foundation of the receptive skills (listening and reading) to produce output in the form of completion of task the learners are required to attain all the four skills to accomplish their objective of language acquisition as attaining half would not serve the purpose (Vipin, 2015). For this reason, a student would be considered to be a complete gainer of language when he speaks fluently and write effectively.

Language acquisition is a natural process as speaking is learned unconsciously in our daily life but writing skills are learned consciously in schools. There are many other features and differences between these two productive skills. Taking cues from the National Teachers' Institute's manual for retraining English language teachers, "speaking in any language is an integrated skill comprising listening skills, pronunciation skills, grammatical competence, and an appropriate store of necessary vocabulary, among others..." (NTI, 2012). Teaching the speaking skills is predominant in the context of language teaching and learning as it provides learners the opportunities to practice real life speaking in the safety of the classroom with their engagement activating their passively stored language elements.

However, having the proper training on the writing skills would also have an impact in the academic performance of the students in other subjects. This is buttressed in the work of Maduekwe (2007) who submitted that speaking and writing are active skills with significant effect on the academic performance

of learners, not only in English language but in all other school subject areas most especially when the teachers have the adequate, dynamic and updated techniques to teach these language skills to the students.

Notwithstanding, Kpolovie (2003) also emphasizes in his work that academic achievement of student is the ability of the students to study and remember facts and being able to communicate their knowledge orally and written form even in an examination condition. To him, there is a link between students' ability to effectively communicate through the art of writing and their academic performance. This accentuates the fact that a student with poor language skill tends to perform poorly in other subject areas. More so, Aina and Olanipekun (2013) in their work on the effect of English language on academic performance in Physics and computer science also asserted that students who have problem in communication skills i.e., speaking and writing may likely not to do well academically. English language being the only medium of classroom instruction in Nigerian schools has affected students' academic performance greatly because the language is foreign to students. Hence, there is the need to develop sound speaking and writing skills of English language in learners.

Additionally, Saka (2012) in his treaty observes that there is a correlation between English proficiency and the academic performance of students in secondary schools. Otagburuagu, et al (2007) lent credence to this statement by pointing out that, parents and teachers see failure in writing as a symptom of general failure in other school subjects. Speaking and writing abilities are the demands that should be met. The students' academic performance is greatly relying on these skills. The National Teachers' Institute (2012), in their English language manual, clearly pointed out that so many factors surround the poor academic performance of students in examinations. They reported that poor writing ability led to failure in all written examinations this is because: "...their writing problems that need remediation are numerous and of different types. Some of them come to the secondary school without the ability to read and write English. Some have limited vocabulary to write in English. Others cannot even construct a simple sentence..." (NTI, 2012)

In those view, it can be summarized that a good speaking skill paves way for effective adaptation of students in schools and for excellence in oral examinations. On the other hand, effective writing skill is essential for students to perform well in all written examination. Consequently, this paper aims at investigating the teaching speaking and writing skills as impetuses to senior secondary school students' academic performance in Kwara state, Nigeria. Specifically, the researcher would investigate the influences and methods of teaching speaking and writing skills on the academic performance of students in secondary schools in the state.

The Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

- There is no significant difference in speaking and writing skills as determinants on academic performance of students based on gender.
- There is no significant difference in speaking and writing skills as determinants on academic performance of students based on age.
- There is no significant difference in speaking and writing skills as determinants on academic performance of students based on class.

The Concept and Elements of Speaking and Writing skills

Speaking and Writing are active productive skills used in expressing one's thought. Language is basically spoken. Man has always used the power of speech to verbalize his thought. The knowledge of language acquisition reveals that in acquiring language, the first thing a child is expected to be exposed to is speaking before learning how to write. Ampa, and Akib (2019) revealed that, for an effective speaking process to take place, the students need to arrange a correct sentence in their conversation. They further expressed that one of the elements of speaking skills that a student is expected to learn is "mechanic" including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

In addition, speaking is the delivery of language through the mouth. To speak, we create sounds using many parts of our body, including the lungs, vocal tract, vocal chords, tongue, teeth and lips. Also, a good speaking skill goes in concomitant with correct pronunciation. Students who learn English speaking should recognize the ways to pronounce the sounds either segmental sounds or supra-segmental sounds. Therefore, pronunciation includes many aspects that are related to articulation of sounds, intonation, and stress. Furthermore, in speaking, grammar refers to the set of rules that allow us to combine words in our language into larger units. The utility of grammar is also to learn the correct way in oral and written forms of a language. This is done by a set of rules or principles that can be used to generate all well-formed utterances in English (Ampa&Akib, 2019). The usage of ungrammatical sentences in speaking can make the listeners misunderstand what the speakers mean. Therefore, the students need to understand the rules of English in order that they can arrange the correct sentences in their conversation.

More so, another crucial element of English-speaking skill is fluency. It is defined as the ability to speak or to express oral language. The fluency in speaking can be useful in many special ways of students' daily activities. For instance, if a student lacks fluency in his/her spoken English, he/she would have difficulty interacting face-to-face with others. The fluency in speaking can help increase the level of self-confidence and self-esteem. It is evident that the good level of self-confidence and self-esteem will increase a better chance of life (Brown et al, 2010). Consequently, someone who cannot speak fluently is often unsure about how to respond while conducting conversation. This case often causes confusion and misunderstanding, so that listeners can be disturbed. Therefore, a teacher must provide solutions in improving the students' speaking skills. One way is to design materials that match the initial ability level of the students being taught.

As a result, students with a good mastery of spoken English are competent and fluent in their communication skills and are able to maintain good social relationships. Speaking skill is learned and it can be improved through constant practice and careful guidance. Spoken language mirrors a learner's experiences, thoughts, culture, ideas and emotions. (Ampa&Akib, 2019).

Like the speaking skill, writing is also an active productive skill. It is mainly used to communicate thoughts and feelings to the reader. It is regarded as the most difficult aspect of the four language skills because it requires full literacy knowledge. As a result of this, Maduekwe (2007) defined writing as a technical skill that involves complex and varied processes some of which may be going simultaneously. Similarly, Grabe (2009) and Ahn (2014) believed that among language learning skills, writing has been consistently referred to as a complicated skill particularly for non-native speakers of English due to the fact that they are not exposed to English compared with English native speakers. More so, Ejraee, Baradaran and Sharif (2014) also considered writing as a difficult learning skill that is needed by EFL students from primary to higher education.

Moreover, Kennedy in Habib (2015) revealed that writing was no longer perceived as an individual task taught separately from other language learning skills. It was instead viewed as a process of pedagogy (prewriting, drafting and post writing) through which students learned to make a relationship between

what they read and what they tend to write. This means that it is very difficult to separate reading activities from writing. As the popular saying that “you can’t give what you don’t have” which means some ideas is needed to be acquired before the ability to write begins. In the study of Ahn (2014), a pedagogical writing technique is suggested. According to the results of the study, he claimed that critical reading is a positive, effective and beneficial reading strategy that can be used by Korean teachers to help their students improve their expository essay writing.

However, several works have proved that reading is the most effective method to improve writing skill of students. For instance, the reading-writing reconnection theory by Horning and Kraemer (2013) stated that reading can or should be used as an effective method to teach/learn writing effectively in high schools and colleges. More importantly, the process of academic writing is started from choosing a topic, writing an introductory paragraph, paragraph development, and concluding paragraph. All those paragraphs can be in the form of argumentative, descriptive, narrative, expository essay, paper, report, project portfolio, a case study or a dissertation (Redman & Maples, 2017). More so, it is worthy to note that the purpose of writing in an academic setting is different from that of non-academic one. Writing to a friend, for example, is aimed at informing him/her about the writer’s condition; and writing a funny story, the main purpose is usually to entertain the reader. In the academic setting, however, the purpose of writing is to express thoughts in a logical and critical way (Horkoff, 2015).

Also, Mehrabi (2014) revealed that the ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. Similarly, Ampa, and Akib (2019) clearly stated that writing is a means of conveying thoughts or feelings through written form of a language that consists of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses. The thoughts conveyed to others must be expressed in words that support the meaning precisely and in accordance with what one wishes to express. The words should be arranged regularly in phrases and sentences, so that people can grasp what they want to say, then, the sentences are combined into discourse that produce complete meaning.

In this case, the rules of English sentence patterns should be understood, because the more regular the language is used, the easier the one understands the thoughts we express. Besides, the elements of writing skills are also important to consider in writing a good essay. In furtherance, Wilber in Ampa et al (2019) proposes five elements of good writing: central idea, organization, (3) supporting materials, (4) expression, word choice, and point of view, and spelling, grammar and (5) punctuation.

Writing can be classified into two categories: formal and informal. Each category serves specific purposes in education. Formal writing relies on the writing process to produce a well-written, clear, thought-out response. However, North Coast Institute (2007) highlighted the writing process as composed of five steps: prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. Prewriting is where ideas and facts are gathered. Drafting is the first shot at writing the piece. Revision is where one looks for ways to improve the work. Editing is where mistakes are found and corrected, whether grammatical or spelling. Finally, publishing is where the final draft is produced and ready for the appropriate “audience”.

Speaking and Writing skills as Determinants on Academic Performance of Students in Secondary schools

Speaking and writing skills are used for measuring the proficiency level of every student through the use of oral and written tests. Several studies have indicated that there is a link between academic

achievements and proficiency in the language of instruction. For example, in the works of Komba, Kafanabo, and Njabili (2012) revealed that the poor performance of secondary school students in their national examinations in Tanzania has always been attributed to their low proficiency in the language of instruction, which is English. This implies that, one of the major factors which determine students' success in academic is proficiency in the language of instruction, which facilitates communication between teachers and students. In other words, if students do not have adequate communication skills, effective learning cannot take place (David and Ogunsinji, 2009; Neke, 2003)

Brooks and Adams (2009) are of the view that in any educational programme, students' academic performance is an outcome of a learning process which requires interaction and negotiation of meanings, as part of the process. At every point of the learning process, communication skills are fundamental which are necessary for the correct interpretation of lectures, texts, and assessment tasks. There is enough evidence from literature that for students studying in their second language, language proficiency is a greater impediment to their studies than other factors (Brooks and Adams, 2009). In furtherance, this view is supported by an example from Nigeria where the poor performance of students in English language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of the decline in academic achievement and standard of education (David & Ogunsinji, 2009).

A similar observation is given by Neke (2003), who also pointed out that, among the many reasons that have been advanced to explain the declining trends in educational standards in Tanzania, poor proficiency in speaking and writing skills has been a widely used argument. When these arguments are carefully evaluated, it is implied that there is a link between students' academic achievement and their proficiency in language skills, particularly in the language of instruction. More so, Alufohai (2016) asserted that one major area where the importance of English Language cannot be overlooked is its provision of access to education. It is the medium of instruction through which learners acquire knowledge and skills. To the average Nigerian, therefore, proficiency in English Language skills especially in writing in today's diverse society is the key to world's proof of knowledge and universal culture. It is a gateway to success in the global economy. In an increasingly demanding world of literacy, the importance of ensuring students' proficiency in writing skills cannot be overemphasized.

Moreover, Ogunsiji (2009) posited that Nigerian student would perform better in their studies based on their level of proficiency in English. This is consistent with Komba and Bosco's (2015) assertion that the academic performance of students is influenced by their level of proficiency in the language of instruction. Not being proficient in the language of instruction is an impediment to learning because the teacher and the learner may not be communicating effectively.

Maduekwe (2007) also averred that at the secondary school level students are expected to develop high level of proficiency in English language so as to facilitate personal development in other areas. He buttressed that at the secondary school level the goal of spoken English is to ensure that the students become competent speakers of English which will enhance further learning in the tertiary and vocational institutions. More so, spoken English is expected to serve as a medium for national and international intelligibility. Similarly, Jimoh and Kenneth (2016) also revealed that deficient English Language use skills could affect academic performance of students in a country like Nigeria where English Language is a second language.

Methodology

The method used to carry out this research was the descriptive survey method. According to Khan et al (2009), descriptive survey design is concern with conditions or relationships that exists, opinions that are

held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident, or trends that are developing. The survey research type was considered because there is no manipulation of the independent variables by the researcher. This method involves the collection of data or information from a sample of a population through the use of a researcher-designed questionnaire.

The population for this study comprises all and students of the senior secondary schools in Ilorin South LGA. The target population consists of students from the senior secondary schools in Ilorin South local government. Five (5) senior secondary schools were selected from all the senior secondary schools in Ilorin South LGA. Not only that, 20 students were sampled from each of the 5 selected senior secondary schools make a total of 100 respondents. The students were randomly selected from SS1-SS3 classes through simple random sampling technique. The sample drawn from the population was deemed fit to be a true representation of the entire population.

The instrument used for this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire. These questionnaires were used to find out the influence of speaking and writing on students' academic performance in senior secondary school in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara state. The study employed descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage. The data were analyzed based on the stated research questions. The research questions were answered using mean and ranking order while the hypotheses were tested using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at significant level of 0.05.

Results Analysis

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	40	40%
Female	60	60%
Total	100	100%

Age	Frequency	Percentage
12-13	14	14%
14-15	50	50%
16-17	36	36%
Total	100	100%

Class	Frequency	Percentage
SS1	29	29
SS2	41	41
SS3	30	30
Total	100	100%

The tables above show the demographic data of the respondents on the bases of gender, age and class. Out of the 100 student that were sampled, 40 (40%) of the respondents were males, while 60 (60%) of the respondents were females. The result implies that female respondents are more than male respondents. The age distribution of respondents is in three categories. The first category are the respondents between the age of 12 and 13 years which makes up 14% of the total respondents while the second category of the respondents are between the age of 14 and 15 years which makes up 50%. Also, the third category is

based of the respondents are between 16 and 17 years old which makes up 36%. Altogether, we have a total of 100% respondents across the ages and the ages 16 and 17 have the highest number of frequency. The distributions of classes are SS1, SS2, and SS3. Respondents in SS1 are 29 % while SS2 and SS3 are 41% and 30% respectively. However, respondents in SS2 had the highest frequency.

Mean and Rank Order of Participants' Responses on Speaking and Writing Skills as Determinant Factors on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State

	Items	Mean	Rank	Remark
1	I perform well in class because of my good speaking and writing skills.	3.20	1st	Affirmed
2	My teachers reward me with good speaking and writing skills in class.	3.02	2nd	Affirmed
3	I qualified for school competitions because I perform well in speaking and writing English.	3.02	3rd	Affirmed
4	My participations in speaking and writing clubs in school greatly assisted my performance in class subjects.	3.01	4th	Affirmed
5	I always understand my school subjects but I don't know how to present it during test and examinations.	2.19	5th	Not Affirmed

This above table reveals the responses of students on how good speaking and writing skills influenced their academic performance. Ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd up to 4th are items whose mean scores are above 2.50. This implies that: students perform well in class because of their good speaking and writing skills; students good speaking and writing skills are influenced by the reward given to them by their teacher; students are qualified to participate in competition because of their good speaking and writing; students participation in speaking and writing clubs greatly assisted their academic performance in school. The last item that states that students understand their school subjects but do not know to present it during examination ranked 5th goes below the average mean score of 2.50. Therefore, all the items indicate that students speaking and writing skills are determinant factors to their academic performance in school in Ilorin South, Kwara state except the last ranked score which goes below the mean score.

Mean and Ranking Order of Participants' Responses on the Methods of Teaching speaking and writing on academic performance of secondary school students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara state

	Items	Mean	Rank	Remark
1	My teachers usually take us through speaking and writing activities in my class.	3.48	1st	Affirmed
2	I always have dialogue class like debates, speech and talks in and outside my class.	3.07	2nd	Affirmed
3	Frequently, we do narrative activities where I am asked to tell an interesting story or my favorite film.	2.82	3rd	Affirmed
4	My teacher always gives me a topic to write about every week.	2.47	4th	Not Affirmed
5	I play a role in every drama classes organized by my teacher.	2.40	5th	Not Affirmed

The above table reveals the responses of students on the methods of teaching speaking and writing in relation to their academic performance of secondary school students. Ranked 1st, 2nd, up to 3rd are items whose mean scores are above 2.50 average mean score. This implies that: teachers in the various schools usually take their students through speaking and writing activities in my class; students always have

dialogue class like debates, speech and talks in and outside my class; students do narrative activities where they are asked to tell interesting stories or their favorite movies are effective methods used by teachers that have great influence on their academic performance in school. While items ranked 4th and 5th which state that: teachers always give students a topic to write about every week; students are allowed to play a role in every drama classes organized by their teacher are methods that are underutilized by teachers in secondary schools in Ilorin South of Kwara state. Therefore, it is posited that all the items from 1 to 3 affirmed the methods used by teachers that improved students' speaking and writing skills in school.

Analysis of Research Hypotheses

T-test Statistics Showing the Difference in speaking and writing skills as Determinant factors on the academic performance of secondary school students based on gender.

Gender	No	Mean	S. D	Df	t-value	Sig	Remark
Male	40	14.5250	2.30926	98	.307	.647	Retained
Female	60	14.3833	2.22537				

*insignificance at $p > 0.05$.

The above table shows that the t-value .307 is obtained with a p-value of .647 computed at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of .647 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis one is retained. Therefore, there is no statistically difference in speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on the academic performance of secondary school students based on gender. ($t_{98} = .307, p > 0.05$).

ANOVA summary of showing the difference in speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on academic performance of students based on age.

Variables	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig	Remark
Between Groups	6.821	12	.568	.568	1.290	
Within Groups	38.339	87	.441			Retained

*insignificance at $p > 0.05$.

As shown in table 9, the F-value of .568 with a p-value of 1.290 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value 1.290 obtained is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis two is retained. Thus, this implies that, there is no statistically significant difference in speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on academic performance of students based on age based on age. ($F_{\{12, 87\}} = 0.568, p > 0.05$).

ANOVA summary of showing the difference in speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on academic performance of students based on class.

Variables	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig	Remark
Between Groups	4.944	12	.412	.663	.782	
Within Groups	54.046	87	.621			Retained

*insignificance at $p > 0.05$.

As shown in table 10, the F-value of .663 with a p-value of 0.782 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value 0.782 obtained is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis three is retained. Thus, this implies that, there is no statistically significant difference in the influence of speaking and writing skills on academic performance of students based on class. ($F_{\{12, 87\}} = 0.782, p > 0.05$).

Discussions

The study investigated speaking and writing skills as determinant factors on academic performance of senior secondary school students in Ilorin South L.G.A of Kwara state. From the analysis above, the following discussions of findings were made:

First, the findings revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female students which indicate that both genders' speaking and writing skills greatly influence their academic performance in school. This finding is in line with the findings of Vipin (2015) who submitted that speaking and writing skills influence academic performance. Also, it is in consonance with Maduekwe (2007) who pointed out that speaking and writing are crucial factors that have essential effect on the academic performance of learners. The outcome of this finding is also in agreement with Kpolovie (2003) who emphasized in his work that academic achievement of student is depending on speaking and writing skills. Other several empirical studies have shown that being proficient in English (both speaking and writing) is a necessity for students to understand other school subjects (Abedi& Herman, 2010; Mclleman, Fernandes, & NcNulty, 2012; Starcher&Proffitt, 2011).

Furthermore, findings of this study also make it crystal clear that the methods of teaching speaking and writing by teachers in secondary schools also facilitates their academic performance of their students in class. This is in accordance with Vardi (2000) who posited that teachers should encourage their students to write frequently on their own both in and out of the classroom settings. Likewise, Harmer (2008) and Salih (2013) buttressed different activities and methods English teachers can deploy in order to develop writing skills of learners. They concluded that alternating the various methods by teachers would facilitate learners' performance in language skills.

Meanwhile, the National Teachers' Institute's English language teaching manual which also clearly postulated that: "Our students should be motivated to write correctly, using the English language. It is the duty of the teacher to drill students into writing Standard English. To this end, regular writing practice is essential..." (NTI, 2012). On this note, methods used in the teaching speaking and writing skills significantly have essential effect on learners' performance in their academic areas.

Conclusion

Effective communication in English language relies on proficiency in both speaking and writing. The teaching of speaking and writing skills in senior secondary schools should not be handled with levity as the success of the students in English and all other subjects are tied to the mastery of these skills. Every English teacher should be regularly trained and equipped with adequate skills and methods of teaching these essential language skills for effective classroom teaching. Consistent practice of these skills must also be ensured by the students so as to reach the mastery and proficiency levels. Schools should also encourage language based activities such as writing competition, oratory contest, debates and so on in order to give the students the chance to becoming a better user of the English language. Finally, government should also provide adequate textbook materials, workbooks, audio books, video recordings for both private and public schools for English language teachers to lay their hands on for effective teaching of these skills.

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