

Students' Gender and Age as Factors of Success in Arabic Language Literacy of Junior Secondary School 3 Students of Ogun State

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Abstracts

This study investigated gender and age as determinants of success in Arabic Language. Two null hypotheses were tested. Achievement test was designed for gathering of data. The validity of the achievement test was tested using the expert opinion method while the reliability was tested using test-retest method. 100 students were randomly sampled from 10 schools while four Arabic language aspects areas were tested: comprehension, translation from Arabic to English and from English to Arabic and sentence structure. This study revealed that students' gender does not influence their academic achievement in Arabic literacy. Furthermore, that age has great influence on Arabic literacy achievement of students. The study concluded with some recommendations towards improving Arabic literacy in Nigeria generally, in Ogun State specifically and towards making the study of the language attractive to the female gender.

Key Words: Arabic literacy, students' gender, Students' age.

Introduction

Historically, Arabic is the oldest foreign language in Nigeria, having been used as a medium of business transactions, cultural integration and communication since the 8th Century (C.E) and long before the advent of Colonial Masters. It currently serves religious, social and diplomatic functions and it is on this strength and recognition that Arabic Language is introduced as a subject of study in Nigerian educational system as an academic discipline (Ayuba, 2012).

Arabic is currently taught and learnt as an optional subject at the Secondary School level across government owned schools in Nigeria (NPE, 2014,2017). The main aim of teaching it is basically to equip students with the techniques of reading, writing, listening and speaking in Arabic. Olaniyan (2016) however, discovered that the focus is mostly the reading and writing skills at the detriment of the two other language skills. Arabic is "erroneously" regarded in most quarters as "a religion-related language" hence, the domain of the male gender. Gender is used in this study to mean "the conceptualization of gender which is composed of culturally construed male identity and female and not the biological differences between male and females (Oktay, 2009) . Gender is an important affective factor of learning that plays a specific role and influences language acquisition and learning.

Karthigeyan and Nirmals (2012) defined Academic Achievement as the knowledge attained and skill developed by test scores. This is why achievement is generally considered as the major criterion to judge a student's ability, potential and knowledge and hence occupies an important aspect of the instructional

process. Academic achievement measures progress in school's instructions/studies. It is a benchmark to ascertain if learning has taken place, mostly done through test, examination and practicals given by an educational authority or body.

Achievement varies from one individual to another. According to Abdullah and Abdu Buchi (2015), variability in individual student's achievement and performance cannot be attributed to a single factor, but rather, it is the outcome of number of factors such as intelligence, study habits, self-concept, creativity, aptitude, interest, socio-economic factors, and gender. Begum and Phukan (2001) studied the relationship between academic achievement and intelligence in boys and girls and found that there was a correlation between academic achievement and intelligence of the students and the correlation was greater in the case of girls than boys. Oktay (2009) investigated the language learning strategies used by learners of English as a Foreign language with the aim to find the amount of strategies and the domain differences of the strategies used, to reveal the link between strategy used and success levels and to find out the difference in strategy used between gender and its influence on their achievement in English. His findings revealed that the use of language learning strategies are positively effective in success in English, that females were significantly more successful than males in terms of achievements tests, and that they use more language learning strategies in learning English and that there is significant connection between gender, language learn of strategies and achievement in English.

Although researches abound in and on Arabic language in Nigeria, one aspect of research in Arabic language which has not gained ground is the issue of

gender in relationship to Arabic language, and its impact on mastery of the language. Although studies like Olaniyan-Shobowale (2015)'s who examined the gender differences in students' achievement in Arabic language of selected Nigerian students and reported that male students performed significantly better than the female students exist, there is still need to study more roles that gender play on Arabic Literacy.

Age has always been regarded as a major factor in language learning. Palea and Bostina-Bratu (2015) posits that all kinds of learning must take place at a young age. This is because the brain's plasticity and flexibility make it easier and faster to learn a new language. This phenomenon is called the "Critical Period Hypothesis" CPH. The CPH postulates that younger children are better at acquiring a second language than adults based on the fact that a child's brain functions have more ability to absorb more information and learn new things as a progress of development (Satienchayakorn, 2016).

Scovel (2001) explains CPH to mean:

" the notion that language is the best learned during the early years of the childhood, and that after about the first dozen years of life, everyone faces certain constraints in the ability to pick up a new language"

Morford and Mayberry (2000), further established and noted that individuals exposed to language at earlier ages consistently outperform individuals exposed to language at earlier ages for first and second languages of both signed and spoken languages. This statement thus suggest the assumption that "the younger the better". Although, studies of Ekstrand (1976) suggest the opposite; that "the older the better", illustrating that older language learners are more successful and efficient than younger ones.

Summarily, Hu (2016), concludes that young language learners are not really better at language learning but they will achieve excellent outcome in the ultimate second language learning. He therefore advocated based on the CPH, that young learners should be exposed to the second language learning at their early stage as this will make it possible to have superior position in L2 learning than adults and reach better achievement in L12

Although researches abound in and on Arabic language education in Nigeria, two aspects of research has not gained popularity especially among Nigerian authors are the issues of gender and age in

relation to the mastery of the Arabic language. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically investigate if the students' gender and age would influence their academic performance in Arabic literacy and to proffer solutions

Methodology

Arabic achievement test was used to collect data from the entire Junior Secondary School 3 students in Ogun state out of which 100 students were randomly selected from 10 secondary schools in Ogun west area of the state. Four Arabic language area were focused on; comprehension, translation from Arabic to English and from English to Arabic and sentence writing.

Comprehension:-This was used to test the students' ability to read and to comprehend what is been read from a given passage. This was followed by some questions to test the students' ability. Translation:- This was used to test the students' ability in translation. Students were asked to translate some words from English to Arabic and from Arabic to English. This helped the researcher to assess the students' capability in translation.

Sentence Writing:-This was used to test students' ability in expressing their thought in writing. Some sentences were written inconclusive and (the) researcher used it to test the students' knowledge in sentence writing by completing those sentences. This aspects of test covered wide aspects in Arabic language teaching such as Syntax, Morphology, Phonology and current affairs.

The Test-retest was used to determine the reliability level of the instrument. This test was constructed by the researchers with the help of teachers in the selected schools and the result from the test was then used for data analysis. The study tested the following null hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the academic achievements of male and female students in the Arabic (Comprehension, Translation, Sentence Writing) literacy test.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic (Comprehension, Translation, Sentence Writing) literacy test based on age. Due to the indices involved, the hypotheses were tested in sub sections).

H_{01a}: There is no significant difference between the academic achievements of male and female students in the Arabic Comprehension test.

Table 1.1 A (i): Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Comprehension test (COMPT) based on gender.

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
COMPT	Male	52	4.85	.364	.051
	Female	48	4.90	.371	.054

Table 1.1a (i) shows that female students performed better (\bar{X} =4.90; SD =0.37) than the male students (\bar{X} =4.85; SD =0.36) in the Arabic Comprehension test (COMPT).

H_{01b}: There is no significant difference between the academic achievements of male and female students in the Arabic Translation test.

Table 1.1b (i): Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Translation test (TRANST) based on gender.

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TRANST	Male	52	15.63	2.360	.327
	Female	48	15.10	1.741	.251

Table 1.1b (i) shows that male students performed better (\bar{X})=15.63; SD =2.36) than the female Students (\bar{X} =15.10; SD =1.74) in the Arabic Translation test (TRANST).

H_{01c}: There is no significant difference between the academic achievements of male and female students in the Arabic Sentence Writing test.

Table 1.1c (i): Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Sentence Writing test (SWT) based on gender.

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SWT	Male	52	3.00	2.737	.380
	Female	48	3.02	2.979	.430

Table 1.1c (i) shows that female students performed slightly better (\bar{X} =3.02; SD =2.98) than the male Students (\bar{X} =3.00; SD =2.74) in Arabic Sentence Writing test (SWT).

H_{01d}: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of male and female students in the Arabic literacy test in general.

Table 1.1d (i): Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Literacy test in General (GGT) based on gender.

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
GT	Male	52	23.44	3.578	.496
	Female	48	22.98	3.225	.466

Table 1.1d (i) shows that female students performed better (\bar{X} =22.98; SD =3.23) than the male Students (\bar{X} =23.44; SD =3.58) in the Arabic literacy test in general (GGT).

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic (Comprehension, Translation, Sentence Writing) literacy test based on age.

Ho_{2a}: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic Comprehension test based on age.

Table 2.1a: Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Comprehension test (COMPT) based on age.

	AGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
COMPT	1	56	4.88	.334	.045
	2	44	4.86	.409	.062

Table 2.1a shows that students of age1 (10 - 13) performed better (\bar{X} =4.88; SD =0.33) than those of (14 - 18) age 2 (\bar{X} =4.86; SD =0.41) in the Arabic Comprehension test (COMPT).

Ho_{2b}: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic Translation test based on age.

Table 2.1b : Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Translation test (TRANST) based on age.

	AGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TRANST	1	56	15.02	2.014	.269
	2	44	15.84	2.123	.320

Table 2.1b shows that students of age 2 (14 – 18) performed better (\bar{X} =4.88; SD =0.33) than those of (10 - 13) age 1 (\bar{X} =4.86; SD =0.41) in the Arabic Translation test (TRANST).

Ho_{2c}: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic Sentence Writing test based on age.

Table 2.1c : Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic Sentence Writing test (SWT) based on age.

	AGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SWT	1	56	2.52	2.803	.375
	2	44	3.64	2.796	.422

Table 2.1c shows that students of age 2 (14 – 18) performed better (\bar{X} =3.64; SD =2.80) than those of (10 - 13) age 1 (\bar{X} =2.52; SD =2.80) in the Arabic Sentence Writing test (SWT).

Ho_{2d}: There is no significant difference in the performances of students in Secondary schools in Arabic literacy achievement test in general based on age.

Table 2.1d : Summary of Means [\bar{X}] and Standard deviation (SD) of Students' Scores on Arabic literacy achievement test in general (GGT) based on age.

	AGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
GGT	1	56	22.38	3.278	.438
	2	44	24.30	3.289	.496

Table 2.1d (i) shows that students of age 2 (14 – 18) performed better (\bar{X} =24.29; SD =3.29) than those of (10 - 13) age 1 (\bar{X} =22.38; SD =3.28) in the Arabic literacy achievement test in general (GGT).

Table 2.1d (ii): Independent T-test Analysis on students' performance on Arabic literacy achievement test in general (GGT) based on age.

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		Sig.		Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
GGT	Equal variances assumed	.177	.675	-2.904	98	.005	-1.920	.661	-3.233	-.608
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.903	92.343	.005	-1.920	.662	-3.234	-.606

Table 2.1d (ii) shows that the mean difference between conditions was 0.66 and the 95% confident interval of the estimated population means difference is between -3.23 and -0.61. An independent T- test shows that the difference between conditions was significant (T= -2.90, df =98, P=0.005; two tailed). On the basis of this the null hypothesis was rejected. This reveals that there is difference in students' performance in the Arabic literacy achievement test in general (GGT) based on age.

Discussion of findings

For the purpose of this research, a look is taken on the result of the empirical verification of the following relationships:

1. Students' gender and academic achievement in Arabic literacy.
2. Students' age and academic achievement in Arabic literacy.

1. Students' gender and academic achievement in Arabic literacy.

This study revealed that students' gender does not influence their academic achievement in Arabic literacy.

The outcome is as expected because learning and speaking of a language is not gender biased. It is noted

that every Muslim whether male or female must have been a student of Arabic language at one time or the other. It is well documented that female gender do better in spatial aspect while male do better in numeracy but in this case where the language is tied to devotion to God, it therefore follows that the attitude to learning and mastering of it definitely cut across gender.

Furthermore the language is linked with the history of commerce and politics in the West African countries which is not influenced by gender.

It is therefore imperative for people who have the opportunity to learn and use the language irrespective of gender. [put a ref. for this]

2. Students' age and academic achievement in Arabic literacy.

The study found that students' age influenced their academic achievement in Arabic literacy in the aspect of translation, sentence writing and Arabic literacy achievement in general. It was discovered that ages 14 to 18 performed better in Arabic translation, Sentence Writing and Arabic literacy achievement in general than ages 10 to 13 and the differences were significant ($T= 1.98$, $df = 98$, $P= 0.05$), ($T= 1.98$, $df= 98$, $P= 0.05$) and ($T=2.90$, $df=98$, $p<0.0005$) respectively.

The outcome of this study is expected given the complex processing of the deep orthography which is not required of children who are beginning to learn to read. At the initial stage, children learn to read Arabic through the use of a fully vowelized orthography in which all the consonants and vowels are represented in the script. Children generally begin transition to reading a deeper orthography in the third to fourth year of the class when they begin to read texts in which the short vowel diacritics are not included. It should be noted that the fully vowelized, shallow orthography is not only used for children's books; the shallow orthography is also used in certain format texts such as the Quran and poetry.

The difficulty encountered in Arabic writing also accounts to the senior ones achieving more than the younger ones. Its peculiar characteristic of being written from right to left in cursive form, and letters within words being combined when possible testifies to that. The six letters that cannot be joined to a following letter and the spaces within words when these letters appear enhances its difficulty. Therefore, a reader must learn to distinguish word boundaries from those breaks in the cursive script that occur when a letter is of the type that does not connect.

Some letters have different forms word-initial, word-medial and word-final positions and thus learning to read the letters in the Arabic orthography requires knowledge of the writing rules in conjunction with the different word positions of the letters (Abu Rabi, 2001). All these call for more mature minds to achieve than the younger ones.

In conclusion, as evident from the foregoing, Arabic language can be said that the status of Arabic education in our schools is not encouraging and its status in National policy of Education also does not help at all. Although, some private schools make this subject compulsory for their students from basic 7-9 without making available sufficient resources such as teaching aids, professional Teachers, enough time (time table) to teach Arabic and others.

Some schools prefer teaching of Islamic studies in lieu of Arabic and they are two different subjects. Furthermore, Arabic Education in Ogun state secondary schools needs an urgent intervention from appropriate level such as National Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic studies, (NATAIS) and National Policy on Education (NPE), because Muslim students prefer to offer French rather than Arabic. In most schools in Ogun west area of Ogun state, Arabic does not have a space in the schools syllabus, not to talk of having space in class time table.

The reason for this is that government does not employ teachers of Arabic Education and in a school where Arabic teacher is available, the school management will give that teacher another subject to teach like Islamic studies, civic education, social studies and so on.

This study recommends that students should see Arabic as an opportunity for them because of its usefulness in trade, education, diplomatic purpose and other aspects. They should focus on its study without seeing it as a male-only based subject. In addition, it is suggested that Arabic learning be introduced and taught early to children as this is guaranteed to increase their interest, learning ability and motivation based on CPH. Also teachers should put more effort in making the subject easy for both genders. Parents should also contribute their quota by encouraging their wards in acquiring this subject.

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