

Gender and Students' Academic Achievement in Kiswahili Language

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Abstract

Gender is one of the key factors influencing students' academic achievement. In Hamisi District, Vihiga County in Kenya, achievement of students in Kiswahili language is poor, yet no comparison has been made between male and female students' achievement in order to assist in determining intervention strategies. The purpose of the study is to establish gender differences in achievement in Kiswahili language based on County Evaluation results of 2011. The study sample was 317 Form 4 students from 32 secondary schools in Hamisi District, Kenya. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Document analysis guide method was used to seek information about students' academic achievement in Kiswahili language. Major findings of the study are; female students outperformed male students on the average. The study also revealed a statistically non significant difference between males and females in achievement in Kiswahili language examination; $t(315) = 0.79, P = .94$. This confirms earlier research that concluded that though there seems to be mean difference between male and female students in achievement, the average gender gap is statistically non significant and thus gender difference in achievement tends to decline with time. The findings of this study are significant to teachers of Kiswahili language and educationists at large. This is because the results will guide teachers of Kiswahili language while coming up with instructional strategies, as they will understand the need to give male and female students exactly the same opportunities and challenges while teaching Kiswahili subject. Male and female students should therefore be motivated equally so as to enhance their academic achievement since academic achievement in Kiswahili language is not gender related.

Keywords: gender, gender differences, academic achievement, kiswahili language, county evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade there has been evidence of a growing gender gap in educational achievement in a number of developed countries (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). The current world trend and research emphasizes on gender issues following the millennium declaration of September 2000 (United Nations, 2000) which has as its goal among others; the promotion of gender equity, the empowerment of women and the elimination of gender inequality in basic and secondary education by the year 2005 and at all levels by 2015. Weaver- Hightower (2003) notes that according to gender theory, males and females enter the educational system with different sets of behaviors, attitudes and values. Reid (2003) observes that gender inequality has remained a perennial problem of global scope. A study on Iranian students by Masoud (2011) found that gender is an issue with important theoretical and pedagogical implications in second language learning and has received some attention in language learning research. Masoud asserted that gender had a significant impact on how students learnt a language. Studies of the relationship between gender and student achievement demonstrate that girls tend to

have a higher reading achievement than boys (Eurydice, 2010; Nguyen, Wu & Gillis, 2005; Rothman & McMillan, 2003; World Bank, 2004). Girls and boys develop neither at the same biological rate nor at the same cognitive rate (Halpern, 2006). Halpern (2006) observes that since girls generally mature earlier than boys, researchers often attribute their superior early reading skills in part to this biological factor. The ability to learn and use language has a female advantage from as early as during the first two years of life.

Despite the biological factor, research has shown that male and female performance has been shown to be broadly similar. For example, a review of the British General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations revealed that although girls were performing better on average than boys, almost half the schools in the country had males and females progressing at almost equal rates with little to no gap between boys' and girls' performance (Gray, Peng, Steward & Thomas, 2004). Secondary schools in Britain with little or no gaps in performance also tended to have lower overall student achievement (Gray et al. 2004). This study established the general

performance in all the subjects offered in the British curriculum. Though there seems to be mean difference between girls and boys in performance, Bassey, Joshua and Asim (2004) found that the average gender gap is statistically non significant. Therefore, they concluded that the gender difference tends to decline with time.

In Nigeria, Abiam and Odok (2006) found no significant relationship between gender and achievement in number and numeration, algebraic processes and statistics. Similarly Bassey et al. (2004) found that the average gender gap in mathematics achievement was very small and statistically insignificant. Research shows that although males have traditionally outperformed females in mathematics and science, this appears to be disappearing (Spelke, 2005). Nuthanap (2007) found that boys and girls did not differ significantly on academic achievement in Home science subject as the *t*-value was found to be non significant. Fakeye (2010) found that the difference between male and female students' achievement in English language was non significant. In Kenya, a study by Tella, Indoshi and Othuon (2010) found no significant difference in students' academic achievement in English in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) examination between male and female students. Gender difference between male and female students in Kiswahili subject remains unknown. The current study sought to establish achievement in Kiswahili between male and female students in Hamisi District, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) by the United Nations on the promotion of gender equity, the researchers sought to empirically verify the existence or otherwise of gender differences in Kiswahili language achievement in Hamisi District, Vihiga County in Kenya. This is because achievement in Kiswahili subject in Hamisi District has remained poor over years and yet no known study has been done on gender in order to assist policy makers and Kiswahili teachers in coming up with instructional strategies that will give equal opportunity for both male and female students when learning Kiswahili language.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine gender differences in students' achievement in Kiswahili language.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Establish male and female students' achievement in Kiswahili language.
2. Determine gender differences in students' achievement in Kiswahili language.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study adopted County Evaluation results as the achievement test which was standardized locally hence the results may not be generalizable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted in conducting this research because it is appropriate for educational fact-finding as it yields a great deal of information, which is accurate. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Hamisi District, Vihiga County in Kenya. Hamisi District is a hilly terrain straddling the Equator, from East to West. It lies between Latitude 0° 5' S and 0° 15' N and Longitude 34° 27' E and 35° 0' E. This research was based in Hamisi District because the researchers were interested in establishing causes of poor performance in Kiswahili language in the district. Most secondary schools in Hamisi District have posted poor results in Kiswahili language in the past five years, attaining mean scores of 5.11, 5.24, 5.38, 5.29 and 5.53 in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively. This study focused on gender differences because no known study had been done to find out how gender influences academic achievement in Kiswahili language in Hamisi District despite the persistent low academic achievement.

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study population consisted of 1,800 Form 4 students. Krejcie and Morgan formula for sample size (as cited in Kathuri & Pals, 1993) was used to select a sample of 317 students. Krejcie and Morgan have provided the following formula for estimating the sample size (*S*) needed from large populations.

$$1. S = \frac{\chi^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + \chi^2 P(1-P)}, \text{ in which}$$

S= required sample size

N= the given population

P= population proportion assumed to be .50

d= the degree of accuracy set at .05

χ^2 = table value of chi square which is 3.841 for

the .95 confidence level Stratified sampling technique was further used to select 162 female and 155 male students from the total sample of 317 Form 4 students.

Instrument of Data Collection

Document analysis guide method was used to collect data which focused on analysis of documents that were relevant that is; County Evaluation results in order to obtain information about students' mean grades in Kiswahili language academic achievement.

Validity of the Instrument

Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). A research instrument is valid if its content is relevant and appropriate to research objectives. Validation of the instrument was done before the commencement of the actual research.

Reliability of the Instruments

Kombo and Tromp (2006) note that reliability is a measure of how consistent the results from a test are. To determine reliability of the research, a pilot study was carried out on 180 Form 4 students who formed 10% of the population that were not part of the sample (Hopkins, 2000). To test the reliability of the County Kiswahili language Evaluation, test-retest reliability method was used. The researchers adopted 2010 District mock examination and administered it to the students at an interval of two weeks. The results after correlation yielded a Pearson *r* of 0.75 which was above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Lomax, 2007). This enabled the researchers to proceed with the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Relevant documents such as County examination results were obtained from the heads of institutions and the required information recorded down. The students' grades gave a clear picture of the learners' academic achievement in Kiswahili language.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data collected was analyzed using SPSS data editor and presented in form of means, standard deviations and *t* scores. Independent sample *t*-test was used to compare mean achievement in Kiswahili language between male and female students. For the county evaluation examination results (See Appendix).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Male and Female Students' Achievement in Kiswahili Language

This study sought to find out students' academic achievement in Kiswahili language. To achieve this objective, the researchers resorted to use a standardized test and as a result the County Evaluation 2011 Kiswahili examination was adopted. The whole group had a mean of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 1.07. The mean for the female students on academic achievement was slightly higher than that of the male students. Female students had a mean of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 1.05 while their male counterparts had a mean of 4.10 with a standard deviation of 1.11. Female students outperformed

male students on the average. However, the spread of the scores for males was higher than that of females. The summary is reflected in Figure 1.

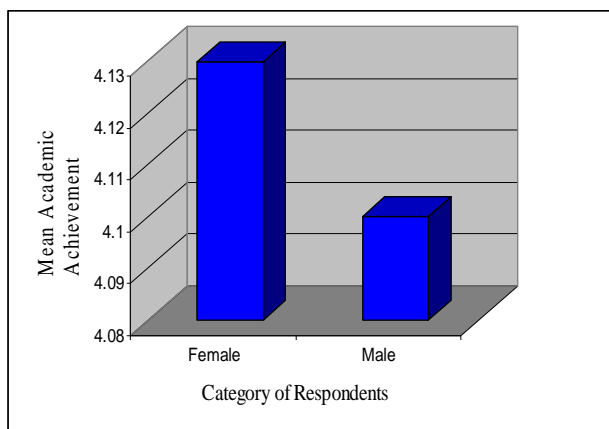


Figure 1: Male and Female Students' Achievement in Kiswahili Language

A review of the British General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations revealed that female students achieved higher than their male counterparts. Although females were performing better on average than boys, almost half the schools in the country had males and females progressing at almost equal rates with little to no gap between males' and females' performance (Gray, Peng, Steward & Thomas, 2004). Secondary schools in Britain with little or no gaps in performance also tended to have lower overall student achievement (Gray et al. 2004). This study established the general performance in all the subjects offered in the British curriculum. The current study sought male and female students' achievement in Kiswahili and found that females performed better than males. Though there seems to be mean difference between girls and boys in performance, Bassey, Joshua and Asim (2004) found that the average gender gap is statistically non significant. Therefore, they concluded that the gender difference tends to decline with time.

Gender Differences in Students' Achievement in Kiswahili Language

To verify whether there existed any gender gap between male and female students' achievement in Kiswahili subject, an independent-sample two tailed *t*-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and *t* value for Academic Achievement in Kiswahili

Overall Group Mean	Sd	Mean		Sd		Df	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i> value
		M	F	M	F			
4.12	1.07	4.10	4.13	1.11	1.05	315	0.79	.94

P < .05

As shown in Table 1, there was a non significant difference between males ($M=4.10$, $SD=1.11$) and females ($M=4.13$, $SD=1.05$) in achievement in Kiswahili language examination; $t(315) = 0.79$, $P = .94$. These results suggest that gender really does not have an effect on academic achievement in Kiswahili language and that the difference was as a result of chance. These results concur with the study of Nuthanap (2007) who found that boys and girls did not differ significantly on academic achievement in Home science subject as the t -value was found to be non significant. Fakeye (2010) found that the difference between male and female students' achievement in English language was non significant. Abiam and Odok (2006) found no significant relationship between gender and achievement in number and numeration, algebraic processes and statistics. Tella et al. (2010) also found that there was no significant difference in students' academic achievement in the English Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination between male and female respondents. Similarly Bassey et al. (2004) found that the average gender gap in mathematics achievement was very small and statistically insignificant. These studies were carried out on other subjects in the curriculum. The current study focused on academic achievement in Kiswahili language and found that the difference in achievement by gender was non significant. This implies that both males and females are capable of performing better as achievement in Kiswahili language is not gender related. There is need therefore to give boys and girls exactly the same opportunities and challenges while teaching Kiswahili subject.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is concluded that both male and female students are capable of performing better in Kiswahili language. This is because there is no significant difference in their achievement in Kiswahili subject. Male and female students should thus be motivated equally so as to boost their academic achievement since academic achievement in Kiswahili subject is not gender related. Achievement of students can therefore be improved equally irrespective of sex of students by employing effective teaching and learning strategies. To maintain the insignificant gender difference, male and female students need thus to compete, collaborate and gain from one another during Kiswahili language teaching and learning.

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Appendix

Table 2: County Evaluation Examination Results In Hamisi District

Name of School	Type of School	School Mean score
Museywa	Mixed	4.35
Kaimosi	Girls	7.84
Munzatsi	Mixed	3.49
Senende	Boys	7.67
Muhaya	Mixed	3.53
Kapsotik	Mixed	3.16
Kapchemgung	Mixed	4.89
Ivola	Mixed	4.61
Nyang'ori	Boys	6.82
Gamalenga	Mixed	3.99
Gimariani	Mixed	3.75
Gimengwa	Mixed	3.18
Gisambai	Mixed	3.83
Buyangu	Girls	4.20
Givogi	Mixed	3.97
Tigoi	Girls	5.36
Gamoi	Mixed	4.12
Jepkoyai	Mixed	3.24
Lwombei	Mixed	3.23
Musiri	Mixed	4.20
Simbi	Mixed	3.44
Imusutsu	Mixed	4.65
Makuchi	Mixed	3.08
Ishiru	Mixed	3.80
Shamakhokho	Mixed	3.70
Kaptis George Khaniri	Mixed	3.38
Kaimosi Demonstration	Mixed	3.27
Cheptech	Mixed	2.79
Friends School Kaimosi	Boys	3.87
Erusui	Girls	6.49
Muhudu	Mixed	3.89
Kaptik	Mixed	5.20
Dr. Maurice Dangana	Boys	6.21
Gavudunyi	Mixed	3.47
Givole	Mixed	4.70
Goibei	Girls	4.93