

POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS' PERSONALITY CONSTRUCTS AS FACTORS OF MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ESSAY WRITING

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ABSTRACT

When asked to write an essay of considerable length, the first reaction of most polytechnic students is to exclaim and plead to be excused from what they consider to be an impossible, arduous, and unnecessary task. Not only do they take essay writing to be a waste of their precious time, they also lack the necessary motivation to engage in the exercise. This study was conducted to investigate the contributions of four selected personality constructs - gender, gender orientation, writing self-concept, and professional training - to their motivation and achievement in essay writing. Research subjects were 40 first-year Higher National Diploma students randomly selected from three faculties. Three Instruments were used - Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT), Students' Writing Self-Concept and Gender Orientation Questionnaire (SEGO), and Students' Motivation to Writing Questionnaire (SMoWQ). Result from the four-way ANOVA test showed a significant main effect of self-concept while gender, gender orientation and professional training each indicated a very small proportion of motivation. The results also showed that the calculated effect size for each factor indicated a small proportion of achievement. The study recommended among others the adoption of process approach to the teaching of essay writing to boost students' self-concept and encourage them to overcome the limitations placed on them by gender, gender stereotypic beliefs, and professional training.

Key Words- *Essay Writing, Personality Constructs, Self-concept, Gender, Gender orientation*

Introduction

The teaching of essay writing is not without some challenges in the polytechnics. Although **Use of English** where essay writing is taught as a core course, most students regard it as a mere compulsory elective so they accord it not so much significance. This much is reflected when students are required to undertake essay writing assignments of considerable length. From the researcher's experience, their first reaction is to exclaim to the high heavens and plead to be excused from what they consider an impossible, arduous, and unnecessary task. Not only do they take it to be a waste of their precious time, which they could better spend working on their core course, they lack the necessary motivation to engage in the exercise of

essay writing because of their perceived inadequacies and deficiencies.

Studies on students' achievement have linked it with motivation. Cookes & Schmidt (1991) confirm motivation as an influencing factor in L2 acquisition. Hudson (2000) identifies motivation as the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a course. Integrative motivation arises from students' admiration of the subject and desire to become familiar with it while instrumental motivation occurs when the student desires the subject for its utilitarian benefits such as meeting requirements for school or university graduation, securing a job, getting a higher pay or achieving higher status. In his review of factors that affect better learning, Yoloye (2004) identifies students' characteristics like genetic make-up, physiological factors, nutritional and health factors, students' ability, and parental influence. He also lists personality factors such as cognitive style, self-concept, readiness, anxiety, and the learning environment. Some factors positively or negatively affect students' motivation. Four of such factors identified in this study are gender, gender orientation, self-concept, and professional training.

Literature shows that gender is a strong predictor of human conduct and many differences have been documented between the attitudes, behaviours, and achievements of male and female. Studies in western education have shown that female students tend to have lower ability than their male counterparts in some fields of study. Yoloye (1994) and Erinosh (2001), for instance, revealed that there is lower enrolment and participation of females in western education and learning than their male counterparts. Yoloye (2004) went on to further confirm that male population is higher than female population in all but arts, law and education faculties of the university under study. Few female students are recorded in science and technology-based faculties. In the same vein, less female students enroll for post-graduate studies in all faculties whether science-based or arts. Duyilemi (2004) confirmed in his study that men dominate the science and technology field while Balogun (1987) noted that women are mostly in nursing and human nutrition. However, numerous studies like those of Asher & Gofman (1973) and Adepoju (1996) have consistently shown that girls are superior to boys on intelligence tests that were highly verbal and that while boys are superior in numerical aptitudes, science, reasoning and spatial relationships, girls are superior in verbal fluency, perceptual speed, memory and manual dexterity. In mathematics, gender difference tends to favour male students (Eisenberg, Martini, & Fabes, 1996) while in the language arts, many researches have reported that girls are more favoured (Miller & Johnson 1999).

Specifically on the subject of writing, Weiser (1999) laments that of one hundred and thirty seven authors in the most recent Norton Anthology of American Literature, less than one-third are women. She is of the opinion that the fact that women are systematically discouraged from the writing process is hardly a new contention. Sadker & Sadker (1992) had earlier noted that while girls begin school equal to or ahead of boys, by the time they graduate from high school they are behind boys in every academic area. This includes creative writing. Part of their explanation to this trend is confirmed in the study of Orellana (1995) who found that in writing workshops, students sex-segregated themselves and that females and minority males are more

likely to be quiet in class and less likely to assume a powerful role in discussion. McCabe (1996) having participated in writing workshops at four universities noted that at three of the programmes, faculty and students were predominantly male and as might be expected; men spoke in workshops far more than women did.

The above scenario is most likely to be the case in the black African situation especially Nigeria where, in the researcher's view, literary writers of the female gender are by far less in population and fewer of them could be said to have made a significant mark in creative writing compared to those of the male gender. However, what some researchers are saying; and what they have tried to establish in recent studies, is that gender difference in motivation and achievement of students occur mostly not because of gender difference but more because of gender stereotypic beliefs. The finding by Eisenberg, Martini & Fabes (1996) for instance, indicates that boys tend to perform better in Mathematics because the subject is viewed as stereotypically male activity while Eccles, Wigfield, Flannagan, Miller, Reuman & Yee (1996) report that girls perform better in language arts because they tend to express stronger self-beliefs in the subject than do boys. Further studies have traced the differences to diverse motivation constructs. For example, gender differences are frequently reported in students':

- perceived value of writing (Wigfield & Eccles, 1997);
- confidence that they can employ various self-regulatory strategies (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990);
- writing apprehension they feel as they attempt the writing tasks (Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999);
- reasons or achievement goals for which they work to succeed in their writing (Pajares & Valiantes, 2001);
- feeling of self-worth associated with writing (Pajares & Valiantes, 2001).

It is the contention of many researchers recently that some gender differences in social, personality and academic variables may in fact be a function of gender orientation – the stereotypic beliefs about gender that students hold – rather than of gender. For example, Pajares and Valiantes (2001) reported that gender differences in variables such as moral voice tend to disappear when gender-stereotypical beliefs are accounted for. Girls who report a strong masculine orientation do not differ in their expression of their moral voice from boys with a similar orientation. Similarly, although gender differences are typically found in empathy, the difference is rendered non-significant when femininity/masculinity is controlled (Karniol, Gabay, Ochion & Harari, 1998). Pajares and Valiante (2001) conducted a study worthy of replication in tertiary institutions in Nigerian setting to find out if differences in writing motivation and achievements of middle school students are a function of gender-stereotypic beliefs rather than of gender. They investigated a number of variables, which include:

- **Gender Orientation:** Students' Gender Orientation was determined by asking students to report how strongly they identified with characteristics stereotypically associated with males and females in American Society – the extremes are termed Masculinity and Femininity assessed Students' Gender orientation beliefs.

Some of their informative findings include the following:

- Femininity correlated with all motivation variables with the exception of writing apprehension and performance-avoid goal orientation both for boys and for girls.
- There were gender differences favouring girls on writing self-efficacy, writing self-regulation, value of writing, task goal orientation and writing GPA.
- Masculinity was modestly associated with self-efficacy for self-regulation with perceived value of writing; and with task goal orientation but the influence of gender remained insignificant in each case.
- Femininity exercised a pronounced influence on each of the motivation variables with the exception of performance-approach goals but the gender difference was rendered non-significant.
- Only femininity was associated with writing self-efficacy, writing self-concept and writing achievement. A modest influence of femininity on writing achievement was reported.

Cherry (2016) defines self-concept as the image that we have of ourselves. She explains that it is essentially a mental picture of who you are as a person. Bracken (1992) identifies six specific domains related to self-concept:

- Social - the ability to interact with others
- Competence - ability to meet basic needs
- Affect - awareness of emotional states
- Physical - feelings about looks, health, physical condition, and overall appearance
- Academic - success or failure in school
- Family - how well one functions within the family unit

From these domains, it can be deduced that self-concept relates to 'competence-rating', 'emotional attachment', and 'success perception' of students in the skill of essay writing. Pajares and Valiante (2001) describe writing self-concept as an expectant belief referring to the judgment of self-worth associated with one's self perception as a writer.

In the area of contribution of professional training (TLA 2005) explains that essay writing is much more than the technical writing done in all professions. While the latter requires some knowledge about a specialized field, essay writing demands in addition, "creativity, curiosity, a broad range of knowledge, self motivation and perseverance". Technical writers put information into easily understandable language but creative writers create original works such as prose, poems, plays and song lyrics for publication or performance. The current thinking is that everyone, irrespective of his professional training, has a story to tell, an experience to relate, or an idea to put across to the general public. It is, therefore, reasoned that since language is a kind of currency in our culture, and currency equates power, then writing and telling our stories as well as new stories for our lives is a way of giving value and voice to what's often silenced, ignored or not heard in our individual lives, our communities and our culture-at-large.

Research Objective

It falls within the responsibilities of the course lecturer to sufficiently motivate his

students to learn from him and benefit from the course of study he is teaching. This he can do by identifying those factors perceived to be obstructive to their learning interests and achievements. This study was, therefore, conducted to investigate the contributions of four selected students' personality constructs - gender, gender orientation, writing self-concept, and professional training - and establish their main and interaction effects on the motivation and achievement of polytechnic in essay writing. This is with a view to finding ways to assist the students to overcome the impediments through necessary remediation.

Research Questions

Two research questions were posed:

RQ1 - Is there any significant effect of students' gender, students' writing self-concept, students' gender orientation and students' professional training on their motivation and achievement in essay writing?

RQ2 - Is there any significant interaction effect of students' gender, self-concept, gender orientation, and professional training on their motivation and achievement in essay writing?

Study Sample

Forty first year Higher National Diploma (HND) students of Osun State College of Technology, Esa-Oke were randomly selected based on their gender and professional training (course of study). Twenty-two (22) males were selected from three faculties - Engineering (7), Environmental Studies (8), and Management Sciences (7). Eighteen (18) females were randomly selected from the three faculties: 5, 6, and 7 respectively. The three faculties represent students' professional training.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were used for the study. The first was the Essay Writing Achievement test (EWAT), which has reliability coefficient of .80. The second was the Students' Writing Self-concept and Gender Orientation Questionnaire (SEGO). The researcher designed SEGO and it was broadly divided into two parts. The first part which measured students' writing self-concept had fifteen items to which the students were requested to respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Very Much Like Me* to *Very Much Unlike Me*. The items reflected the feelings of self-confidence or self-apprehension students might have in undertaking essay writing exercises. This section has Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83. The second section of SEGO also has fifteen items on different writing exercises a student may undertake. They were required to choose whether that kind of writing is better done by a male or by a female. It has a reliability coefficient of .80. The Third instrument is the Students' Motivation to Writing Questionnaire (SMoWQ). It contained 30 items distributed as follows: Writing self-efficacy (4), writing apprehension (3), values of writing (8), professional training (4), teaching effectiveness (7), feedback effectiveness (4). Separate reliability tests were conducted for the six components and their Cronbach alpha coefficients are as follows: writing self-efficacy (.75), writing apprehension (.76), values of writing (.85), professional training (.61), teaching effectiveness (.79), feedback effectiveness (.63). SMoWQ has alpha coefficient of .95. Students were required to respond to each item of SMoWQ on a 4-point

Likert scale ranging from *Very Well like Me or Strongly Agree* to *Very Well Unlike Me or Strongly Disagree* as the case may be.

Procedure

The researcher brought the students together and addressed them on the objective of the study and the requirements for their participation. Next, they were given the Students' Writing Self-concept and Gender Orientation Questionnaire (SEGO) to fill and submit. After submitting the SEGO questionnaire, they were supplied with writing materials to undertake the essay writing exercise. Each participant wrote the Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) within the stipulated time. The researcher personally supervised the writing exercise. As each student finished writing the essay, he/she was requested to fill the Students' Motivation to Writing Questionnaire (SMoWQ) before being released to leave the venue. All the participants successfully produced the three instruments required of them.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, SEGO items were given numerical values ranging from 4 to 1. The mean value was calculated and interpreted as follows: low self-concept (1.0-2.0); medium self-concept (2.1-3.0); high self-concept (3.1- 4.0). To determine students' gender orientation, the mean score is also calculated and interpreted as follows: masculinity (1.0-1.4); femininity (1.6- 2.0). To arrive at the overall students' motivation index, the mean score was calculated and interpreted as follows; low motivation index (1.0-2.0); average motivation index (2.1-3.0); high motivation index (3.1- 4.0). The students' essays were graded based on the following marks allocation: Content 10, Organization 10, Expression 20 and Mechanical Accuracy 10. Students' total score were converted to percentage. The ANOVA of the data analysis is shown in Table 1

Table 1: ANOVA Summary Table for Interaction and Main Effect

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squared	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12.725 ^a	25	.509	2.193	.064	.797
Intercept	98.060	1	98.060	422.300	.000	.968
Gender (GD)	.292	1	.292	1.258	.261	.062
Gender Orientation (GO)	.083	1	.083	.357	.560	.025
Self-Concept (SC)	9.429	2	4.715	20.309	.000	.744
Professional Training (PT)	.052	2	.026	.113	.894	.016
GD * GO	.769	1	.769	3.313	.090	.191
GD * SC	1.015	2	.508	2.187	.149	.258
GO*SC	1.233	2	.617	2.657	.105	.275
GD*GO*PT	.038	1	.038	.166	.690	.012
GD*PT	.256	2	.128	.552	.588	.075
GO*PT	.035	2	.018	.076	.927	.011
GD*GO*PT	.047	1	.047	.202	.660	.014
SC*PT	.115	4	.029	.124	.971	.064
GD*SC*PT	.360	2	.180	.775	.479	.100
GO*SC*PT	.000	1	.000	.000	1.000	.000
GD*GO*SC*PT	.000	0000
Error	3.250	14	.232			
Total	135.000	40				
Corrected Total	15.975	39				

***R. Squared = 797 (Adjusted R Squared = 433)**

Discussions

A four-way analysis of variance was conducted to investigate differences in the degree of motivation of the students towards essay writing in gender, gender orientation, self-concept and professional training. ANOVA results presented in Table 1 show a significant main effect of self-concept ($F(2,14) = 20.309; p < 0.001$ and partial (0.744). Gender, gender orientation, professional training as well as their 1st, 2nd and 3rd order interactions were not statistically significant. However, calculated effect size for each factor indicates that a small proportion of motivation variance is accounted for by each for gender, gender orientation and professional training. The ANOVA summary table for interaction and main effects are presented in Table 2

Table 2: ANOVA Summary Table for Interaction and Main Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squared	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1615.833 ^a	25	64.633	.559	.901	.499
Intercept	63787.718	1	63787.718	551.195	.000	.975
Gender (GD)	.567	1	.567	.005	.945	.000
Gender Orientation (GO)	1.986	1	1.986	.017	.896	.295
Self-Concept (SC)	678.675	2	339.338	2.932	.853	.032
Professional Training (PT)	37.290	2	18.645	.161	.853	.692
GD * GO	54.255	1	54.255	.470	.504	.042
GD * SC	70.876	2	35.438	.306	.741	.050
GD * PT	84.832	2	42.416	.367	.700	.003
GO * SC	5.538	1	5.538	.048	.830	.016
GO * PT	25.581	2	12.790	.111	.896	.057
SC * PT	62.223	2	31.161	.269	.768	.022
GD*GO*PT	35.880	1	35.880	.310	.586	.041
SC*PT	69.665	4	17.416	.150	.960	.032
GD*SC*PT	54.074	4	17.416	.150	.960	.032
GO*SC*PT	100.321	1	100.321	.867	.368	.000
GD*GO*SC*PT	.000	0
Error	1620.167	14	115.726			
Total	93486.000	40				
Corrected Total	3236.000	39				

***R. Squared = .499 (Adjusted R Squared = -.395)**

Discussion

A four-way analysis of variance was conducted to investigate cognitive achievement in essay writing differences in gender, gender orientation, self-concept and professional training categories. ANOVA results as presented in Table 2 show that none of the four main factors as well as their 1st, 2nd and 3rd order interactions were statistically significant. However calculated effect size for each factor indicates that a small proportion of cognitive achievement in essay writing variance is accounted for by each of the factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that in the polytechnic, factors such as students' self-concept, gender and gender orientation have some effects on their motivation and achievement in writing. The implication is that many more students would be sufficiently motivated to engage in

independent essay writing exercises if they were able to get over their low self-concept arising from perceived linguistic inadequacies. A way out of this problem is to encourage the lecturers to adopt the process approach in the teaching of essay writing. The students too should practice the process approach in their essay writing efforts as it will empower and enable them to make clearer decisions about the direction of their writing by means of discussion, drafting, feedback, and informed choices on their paper to meet publishable standard.

This study tends to confirm Pajares and Valiantes' (2001) observation in the area of gender and gender orientation that differences in writing motivation and achievements are a function of gender-stereotypic beliefs rather than of gender. A way to encourage the students to overcome deficiencies in essay writing due to gender-stereotypic beliefs is to establish a well-organized Literary Writer's Club where both male and female students will interact, engage in practical writing, and develop the writing skills and self-confidence by public reading of their write-ups. Female students will overcome the gender stereotype and become more motivated if prizes are awarded for their good write-ups published or read during a literary festival.

Finally, with respect to students' professional training and its effect on their motivation to writing, the students need to be properly counselled on the vocational significance of writing. With sufficient interest and right dose of attention and seriousness, anyone, regardless of his professional leaning, can engage in writing and not only earn living but also make a name for himself, his linguistic sophistication notwithstanding.

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