

# ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AND GENDER AS DETERMINANTS OF PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH DISCOURSE WRITING AMONG HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS IN IBADAN, OYO STATE

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## Abstract

The study was carried out to delve into academic self-efficacy and gender as determinants of performance in English discourse writing in Ibadan, Oyo State. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 male and female high-achieving students. Three validated instruments which are English Language Essay Screening Test ( $r = 0.82$ ), English Language Essay Achievement Test ( $r = 0.76$ ) and Adapted Academic Self-efficacy Scale ( $r = 0.76$ ) were utilized in the study. Three research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. The findings revealed that academic self-efficacy had a positive relationship with performance in English discourse writing while gender had no significant correlation with the dependent variable. The independent variables had no joint effect on the dependent variable ( $R = .231$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.54$ ,  $P > .05$ ). On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that educational guidance services should be made mandatory in schools as educational stakeholders should equally focus on the affective construct (self-efficacy) of high-achieving students.

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**Keywords:** Academic Self-efficacy, Gender, Academic Achievement, English Discourse Writing

## Introduction

The spread of English has gone beyond the frontiers of its traditional base to many other countries of the world, including Nigeria. The language has become part of the nation's chief institution. The role the English

language plays in national life has made it an instructional language. Sogbesan(2006) affirms that English language is taught in Nigerian schools both as a key subject and instructional curricular delivery in every other subject. Opoola(2004) points out, at the same time, that the language is used to facilitate teaching-learning process in Nigerian institutions of learning. Besides, the language is laudably used in a vast way of textual materials, including books, newspapers, magazines and other periodicals for students to learn through.

It could be deduced from the above that English is the most viable device for educational development in Nigeria. Anyway, English as a core curriculum subject is characterized with phonological, morphological, syntactic and discourse levels. The study focuses on the discourse aspect of the language, which is the medium through which literary writing is composed. However, this body of writing is classified into narrative which is account-giving story writing, expository described as a process-explaining form of writing among four that are prevalent in the secondary school syllabus.

However, mass failure in English language especially in public examinations has generated a lot of concern. The May/June West African Senior School Certificate 2010/2011 examination results show that only 451,187 candidates of 1,351,557 who sat for the examination obtained credit passes in English language, representing approximately 29.55 per cent which means that more than 70% of the candidates failed. Similar results were obtained in 2013/2014 as only 529, 425 out of the 1,688,435 candidates were able to obtain credit passes in English, representing 31.28 per cent. In the same vein, at least 870,305 candidates who sat for the June/July 2010 Senior School Certificate examination conducted by the National Examination Council failed to get credit passes in English language. This represents 79% of the total 1,113,177 candidates that sat for the examination that year. It has been established, based on statistical records that less than 30 per cent of over a million students who sat for the examinations within the last six years obtained credit passes in English language.

It is therefore sad enough to record an incessant poor performance in essay writing course among learners, including the so-called high-achieving students. This repeated mediocre performance, over the years, has been a major mind pre-occupation in education. According to Ajibola(2012), the reason underlying the students' lack of success in the writing course are wrong choice of questions, poor knowledge of the question, poor and disorderly presentation of materials, limited vocabulary resources and lexical misuse as well as use of wrong expressions. From all indications, this writing assignment has everything to do with the students' educational wellness and social balance. It is, however, against this backdrop that the researchers of

the study examined the contributory importance of self-efficacy and gender in the discourse writing performance of high-achieving students.

Self-efficacy is an imperative part of preparation and performance. It involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social and behavioural skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes. Adeyemi and Agokei (2010) describe the construct as belief about one's ability to perform successfully in a given course. Fakeye(2010) also views self-efficacy as learners' beliefs about their own ability to accomplish a task. Klassen, Kwawchuk and Rajani(2008) as quoted in Koura and Al-Hebaishi (2014) opine that self-efficacy is a good predictor of human behaviour and actions. It is a constantly metamorphosing phenomenon. It is rather a general capacity that develops through time and experience. According to Bandura(1997), self-efficacy can be categorized as high and low. Ofole and Okopi(2012) opine that students with low self-efficacy are academically at risk.

On the other hand, a student characterized with high self-efficacy braces up and meets the academic rigour and excels in school essay writing because he or she perceives himself or herself as being capable of doing well in school. Conversely, a learner noted for having low academic self-efficacy inhibits good academic performance because of the tendency to see himself or herself as being unable to cope with the academic challenge. Koura and Al-Hebaishi(2014) submit that high or low self-efficacy is all about thoughts that the students hold about themselves which affect their academic performance directly or otherwise. These thoughtful feelings either aid or hinder their academic progress.

Considering the concept of gender in relation to academic performance among high-achieving students, text score variability cannot be over-emphasized. A number of variables such as intelligence, study habits, self-efficacy, self-esteem, attitudinal interests among others are attributed to such performance variability. Zeinivand(2006) reports in his study on the relationship between self-efficacy and students' achievement in schools, finding out that there is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance however, there is a gender significant difference between boys and girls—self-efficacy is documented to be higher in boys than girls(Adeyemo, 2007).

On the contrary, Peterson(2010) reports that the girls' writing ability over boys contributes immensely to their language development. Similarly, Summers(2000) notes that female students perform better than male counterparts in the English language. A research finding reported by Camarata and Woodcock(2006) clarifies that the females are better in academic performance than boys. Jafari and Ansari(2012) examine the effect of collaboration on learners' writing accuracy and report that females in the

collaborative group outperformed males, indicating that gender as a significant role in language collaborative writing. This study therefore delves into the pivotal role of academic self-efficacy and gender in high-achieving students' performance in English essay writing with a view to making relevant recommendations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The mediocre results obtained by male and female students in English essay writing, especially in general test of ability requires educational stakeholders' attention. Poor perception of ability by the students, poor motivation in schools, insensitivity to the psychology of the students on the basis of gender, inadequate counseling service rendering in schools among others are variables impeding academic performance in Nigerian schools. More essentially, studies that investigate into the psychological wellness and gender difference of students are considerably minute in circulation. This informs the researchers' interest in examining how academic self-efficacy and gender determine performance in English essay writing among students who are high achieving in schools.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to find out how academic self-efficacy and gender determine English essay writing performance among high-achieving students.

### **Significance of the study**

The study would be tremendously beneficial to high-achieving students. It would provide them with psychological information about their abilities and potential. It would open up their insight into how the students should perceive their innate ability, which could influence their performance in English essay writing. It would also encourage teachers of English to cater for psychological needs of the students. It would enable teachers of English to be more acquainted with instructional delivery based on gender consideration and sensitivity. The result of this study is hoped to help the parents to play the role of psychologists in shaping academic self-beliefs of their children or wards.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?

2. Is there any significant relationship between gender and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?
3. Is there any significant joint effect of academic self-efficacy and gender on high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?

### **Methods and Materials**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design because the researchers did not manipulate any variable of interest. The nature of the study required schools noted for consistent track records of high academic performance in public examinations in Ibadan. This informed the use of purposive sampling technique to select the four public and private schools in Ibadan-South-West and Ibadan-South-East, making eight post-primary institutions of learning in all. Having identified the schools for the study, the consent of such school authority was appropriately sought by the researchers as the objectives of the study were clearly spelt out. At least, two teachers of English in each of the schools selected were carried along and trained on the special demands of the test measures. The researchers personally administered three different instruments on the students.

The population of the study remained all senior secondary school high-achieving students in Ibadan. For sampling purposes, an aggregate number of eighty students, evenly selected from four public and private schools were involved in the study. Equal number of boys and girls, age ranged between 14 and 17 was maintained. Six boys and nine girls were aged 14, seventeen boys and thirteen girls were aged 15, eleven boys and sixteen girls were aged 16 while six boys and two girls were aged 17. The study called for purposive sampling of the subjects which involved identification procedure. In the process of identifying students noted for high accomplishment in the schools, the cumulative scores of first and second terms in senior secondary school Two (SSS2) in English language teacher-made tests were considered. The first twenty students with 65% and above were further screened using English Language Multiple Choice Essay Questions. The first ten students who achieved 70% and above were used as test takers as well as respondents in the study.

Three research instruments were used in the study: English language Essay Screening Test(ELEST), self-developed and standardized with reliability co-efficient of 0.82, English language Essay Achievement Test (ELEAT), personally constructed and standardized with reliability co-efficient of 0.76 and Adapted Academic Self-efficacy Scale(AASS), developed by Shwarzer and Jerusalem(1995) with internal consistency and reliability co-efficient of 0.76. ELEST was made up of twenty items, multiple choice questions based on the concept of essay writing, meant to

identify high-achieving students to be used for the study. ELEAT measured the ability of the students on narrative and expository essays (discourse writing) while AASS was used to measure the academic self-efficacy of the respondents. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to analyse the data obtained.

## Results

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** Is there any significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Between Academic Self-efficacy and High-achieving Students' Performance in English Discourse Writing

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Academic Self-efficacy	12.4125	3.0088				
			80	.223*	.046	Sig.
Academic Performance	16.4000	1.9917				

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows that there was a positive significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing ( $r=.223^*$ ,  $N = 80$ ,  $P<.05$ ). This implies that self-efficacy is a positive factor responsible for performance in English discourse among high-achieving students.

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** Is there any significant relationship between gender and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Between Gender and High-achieving Students' Performance in English Discourse Writing

Variable	Mean	Std.Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Gender	01.5000	00.5000				
			80	-.092	.417	N.S.
Academic Performance	16.4000	3.0088				

N.S: Not Significant

It is indicated in the above table that there was no significant relationship between gender and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing ( $r = -.092$ ,  $N = 80$ ,  $P>.05$ ). This means that gender was not a contributing factor to performance in English discourse writing among the students.

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** Is there any joint effect of academic self-efficacy and gender on high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing?

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Joint Effect of Academic Self-efficacy and Gender on High-achieving Students' Performance in English Discourse Writing

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
.231	.054	.029	2.9649			
ANOVA						
Model	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	38.306	2	19.153	2.179	.120	N.S.
Residual	676.894	77	8.791			
Total	715.200	79				

N.S: Not Significant

Table 3 reveals the joint effect of the independent variables (academic self-efficacy and gender) on the dependent variable (performance in English discourse writing among high-achieving students) ( $R = .231$ ,  $P > .05$ ). The combination of the independent variables accounted for 54.0% (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.54$ ) of the total variance in the prediction of performance in English discourse writing. The table also shows that the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the regression yielded F-ratio of 2.179. This means that the joint effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable was not significant. By implication, academic self-efficacy and gender do not complementarily predict performance in English discourse writing among high-achieving students.

### Discussion of Findings

This study was carried out to delve into academic self-efficacy and gender as determinants of performance in English discourse writing among high-achieving students.

Research question one investigated the significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing. The result in table 1 ( $r = .223$ ,  $N = 80$ ,  $P < .05$ ) indicated that self-efficacy is a determinant of performance in English discourse writing among the students. This finding supports Liu's (2009) submission that individual's beliefs (academic self-efficacy) about their capacities influence their academic performance. Jungert and Rosander (2010) affirmed that students with high-self efficacy overcome challenging tasks and academic obstacles and focus on opportunities. Fakeye (2010) equally found that academic self-efficacy has significant influence on academic performance. Merriman (2012) also established that high-achieving students do have high self-efficacy which influences their performance.

Research question two sought to find out if gender and high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing had a significant relationship. The result in table 2 ( $r = -.092$ ,  $N = 80$ ,  $P >.05$ ) shows that gender was not a contributing factor in performance of English discourse writing among the students. This finding negates most of the general submission of earlier literature such as Bijami, Kashef and Khaksari(2013), Bidin and Jusoff (2009) and Peterson(2000) that gender difference exists in English language writing performance.

Research question three examined the joint effect of academic self-efficacy and gender on high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing. The result in table 3 ( $R = .231$ ,  $R^2 = 0.54$ ,  $F - \text{ratio} = 2.179$ ,  $P >.05$ ) indicated that academic self-efficacy and gender had no joint effect on high-achieving students' performance in English discourse writing. This means that the combination of both gender and academic self-efficacy do not jointly predict academic performance of high-achieving students in English discourse writing.

This result contradicts Pajares and Valiante(2001) who reported that girls are more confident in writing than boys. Equally, the study is in sharp contrast with Kamari et al.'s(2010) findings that male students are better writers on opinion-related essays because of their ability to express their opinions and ideas.

## Conclusion

The study indicates that high-achieving students' education will be further enhanced and advanced if rapt attention is paid to the affective variable such as academic self-efficacy. The potentially gifted individuals will be able to demonstrate higher performance in English language, most especially in discourse writing if their psychological wellness is put into consideration and assisted through effective educational guidance services. Succinctly put, high academic self-efficacy is a predictive factor of excellent academic performance among high-achieving students, which must be worked upon among stakeholders in education.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following useful recommendations are made:

- It is important that educational guidance services are made mandatory in secondary schools to enable the high-achieving students to examine their academic self-efficacy in order to have their performance improved;



- Teachers of English should not only focus on cognitive domain in teaching high-achieving individuals but also tailor their teaching towards the affective construct (self-efficacy) of the students;
- Teachers of English should approach teaching–learning process by taking both male and female students into consideration without bias;
- High-achieving students are encouraged to report to guidance counsellors/psychologists in schools when there is a discrepancy between their abilities and performance in English (discourse writing);
- Parents are to seek both cognitive and affective solutions to their children’s academic challenges in schools;
- Other stakeholders in education such as school’s administrative personnel should ensure that psychological well-being of high-achieving students is adequately catered for.

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