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## Learners' Motivation, Gender, Andoral English Performance among High-Ability Students in Ibadan, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study examines predictive influence of motivation and gender on Oral English performance among students noted for high ability in Ibadan, Oyo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey of correlation type. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting four public and private secondary schools in Ibadan North and Akinyele Local Government Areas with an aggregate number of 258 high-ability students. Instruments utilised were: English Language Screening Achievement Test ( $r=0.72$ ), Achievement Test on Oral English ( $r=0.84$ ) and Academic Motivation Questionnaire ( $r=0.84$ ). Data were analysed, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Independent t-test and Multiple Regression Analysis. Learners' motivation predicts Oral English performance among high-ability students ( $r=.541$ ,  $n=258$ ,  $p<.05$ ), but gender does not predict Oral English performance among the students (Crit-t 1.96, Cal. T = 0.097,  $p>.05$ ). There is a joint contribution of learners' motivation and gender to the prediction of Oral English performance ( $F_{(5,41)} = 52.872$ ,  $R^2 = 0.54$ ,  $p<.05$ ) among the respondents. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of high-ability male and female learners should be meticulously worked upon by all stakeholders involved in the Oral English instruction of students noted for superior ability in our schools.

**Keyword:** Learners' Motivation, Gender, High-ability Students, Oral English Performance

### Introduction

Learners who are exposed to Oral English in our secondary schools display these two forms of attitude towards the subject aspect today. Oral English, an offshoot of English Language, is also recognised as Test of Orals in Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) conducted by West African Examinations Council and National Examination Council. This pronunciation aspect of English is significant because it enables learners to master other language skills: that is reading and writing. However, the fundamental problem the aspect of English is confronted with is poor or negative attitude among high-ability students. Of course, at SSCE level, sixty (60) multiple choice question items are generated by these examining bodies, covering vowel and consonant sounds, stress patterns and rhyme. These items go a long way in improving listening and speaking skills among students if such are properly taught, learnt and mastered. High-ability



students, by virtue of their superior cognitive ability, refuse to attach any importance to Oral English anyway.

Considering the problem of poor pronunciation in Nigeria, Awonusi (2015) emphasises that speakers of English, including high-ability students, are encountered with linguistic interference, orthographic influence, articulation basis, socio-cultural values, Americanisms, spelling system or confusables, among others. Monophthongisation of diphthongs, diphthongal split, vowel insertion, place of articulation substations, phonetic approximations and inability to make tense or lax distinctions in vowels characterise linguistic interference. Orthographic influence involves a situation where there is no sound-to-letter correspondence in English such as 'often /'pfn/, yacht /jpt/, ewe /ju:/ and so on. Articulation basis centres around an erroneous belief, socio-cultural values revolve around attitude of the speakers towards the language, (the major problem of high-ability students), while Americanism is a copy of American version of pronunciation by Nigerian speakers. Spelling system or confusables can be traced to words such as 'cupboard' 'receipt', 'debt', and so on.

Ordinarily, high-ability students should have been able to ward off all these inadequacies because they have intellectual capacity to. They are therefore categorised among those who falter in mastering oral concepts because of their negative attitude. However, the researchers of the current study are optimistic that, if a right approach is adopted, the situation can be ameliorated among the students. This is essentially the reason why the psychological make-up – with direct emphasis on motivation – of these learners should be considered and worked upon, especially by the teacher. High-ability learners' motivation in Oral English class is very important. Motivation plays a vital role in Oral English class without which even high-ability learners cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher (Samad, Etemadzadeh and Far, 2012). Motivation is one of the key factors influencing the performance of students in second language learning because it often compensates for deficiencies in language aptitude and learning. It follows that all other factors involved in second language acquisition presuppose the effects of motivation to some extent. Motivation as a force that energises, sustains and directs behaviour towards a goal contributes in no small measure to achieving highly in Oral English lesson.

Motivation in this study could be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the basic force which energises a high-ability learner to attain oral language goals successfully. When high-ability students are motivated intrinsically, they feel joy and satisfaction in oral language performance. Internally motivated high-ability learners remain engaged in learning at schools, exert continuous efforts and concentrate on understanding and completing the learning tasks. Intrinsic motivation operates on the process of internalisation. When high-ability students feel autonomy and perceive competence of the teachers, they perform much better in their studies than those who perceive less autonomy (Malik and Parveen, 2015).

In Oral English class, intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in the development of study habits and academic achievement. Verbal praise by teachers and parents (social approval) enhances the intrinsic motivation of the students. Intrinsic motivation gives pleasure and increases curiosity and personal interest in the oral learning task. When high-ability students are intrinsically motivated, they feel interest and enjoyment in what they are doing and have a sense



of capability and determination. They do not feel tension, stress and anxiety (Deci and Ryan, 2005). Intrinsically motivated high-ability students do not give up in difficult circumstances and they try their best to achieve their Oral English task. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation refers to do something for any external reward. Extrinsically motivated behaviour is external and interjected.

Extrinsic motivation is all that the teachers of the high-ability students do to encourage their students to perform better in Oral English lessons. Teachers are expected to motivate the students and guide them about organisation and proper management of skills in Oral English. The students who demonstrate non-challant attitude in oral class should be encouraged by giving them external rewards such as certificates or medals. External rewards have their significant role in encouraging the students to perform better. Certificates presented to the students could stimulate the interest of the learners such that their participation in Oral English class could bring about better performance on their part. These certificates could be presented to the students after group or personal project has been completed on a termly basis or at the end of the session. Medals could also be used as an impetus to spur the students into action in Oral English class. For instance, every student who participates and excels in the laboratory work could be given medals per term or academic session to encourage them perform better and challenge others to measure up to excellence.

Another important variable in this study is gender. Considering the concept of gender in terms of academic performance among high-ability students, test score variability cannot be over-stressed. A number of variables such as intelligence, study habits, self-efficacy, self-esteem, attitudinal interests among others are attributed to such performance discrepancy (Adelodun and Asiru, 2015). Gender is one of main predictors of human conduct and there has been a difference between achievement of boys and girls. Hartley and Sutton (2013) affirm that females are superior in the area of academic achievement. Maccoby and Jacklin (2001) submit that the fluency measures of verbal ability are more prominent among girls than boys. The authors are of the opinion that girls learn a little earlier to talk, use sentences and a greater variety of words. Taking a similar stance, Kember (2004) remarks that the verbal ability of girls over boys contributes immensely to their language development in relation to speaking more clearly.

According to Soori and Zaman (2012), male and female students use language feature (writing style) differently. Due to the fact that boys and girls speak differently, they can write differently as well. Therefore, most language features are used equally by male and female writers. Bijami, Kashef and Khaksari (2013) are of the view that male students should be provided with more concrete processes in writing. The authors equally report that boys with higher motivation perform better than those who are poorly motivated in writing. Most societies believe that boys generally do better than girls in school subjects, including English Language (Test of Orals) (Adeagbo, 2004; Adeyinka, 2005).

Furthermore, Ariyo and Ugodunwa (2007) find that gender has implication on students' academic performance. The study revealed that boys and girls possess differential abilities because boys are found superior in numerical aptitude, science reasoning and spatial relationship while girls are reported to be superior in verbal fluency (Oral English aspect), perceptual speed, memory and manual dexterity. In a study undertaken by Amaechi, Nwazuo, Ezeanochie and Babatunde (2019), gender is reported to have no significant influence on the creative ability of



students. This simply means that boys and girls do not significantly differ in creative ability among students with exceptional ability. This finding lends credence to that of Matud, Rodriguez and Grande (2007) who establish that there is no gender difference in the creative performance among students noted for high ability. The role of gender in language acquisition and learning cannot be over-emphasised. Of all variables influencing test performance, sex difference has received the greatest amount of research. The present study seeks to find out the predictive influence of learners' motivation and gender on Oral English performance among high ability students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

1. Does learners' motivation predict Oral English performance among high-ability students?
2. Does gender predict Oral English performance among high-ability students?
3. Is there any joint contribution of learners' motivation and gender to Oral English performance among high-ability students?

### Methodology

The nature of the study called for the adoption of a descriptive survey research design as a result of the fact that manipulation of variables of interest was not involved. Based on the special demands by the study, schools with notable outstanding academic achievements in general examinations were considered in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. Therefore, four public and private secondary schools were purposively sampled in Ibadan North and Akinyele Local Government Areas on the basis of some criteria, making a total of eight.

Consequent upon this, ethical approval for the use of those schools for research purposes was sought and obtained from the Ministry of Education Board in the State Secretariat, followed by a letter of introduction from the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The consent of the authority of each school was sought as the rationale for the study was clearly elucidated. At least, a teacher of English in each of select schools was duly carried along and trained on the modality for supervision during the instrument administration. The researchers administered three different instruments to the students single-handed.

The population of the study remained all senior secondary school (SSS) high-ability students in Ibadan. The sampling eventually involved an aggregate number of two hundred and fifty-eight (258), made of even number of boys and girls with age ranged between twelve and twenty-three (12-23) years. The first stage of the procedure adopted fifty (50) students with cumulative scores of 60% and above in their previous SSS 1 and 2 classes. The students were selected across departments in their present classes (SSS 2 and SSS 3), making four hundred (400) in all. Second phase involved the use of English Language Screening Achievement Test by Adedun and Asiru (2015). Individual students who made 65% and above were given consideration to be used as test takers as well as respondents. In the long run, two hundred and seventy (270) made the list. Third process level was the inclusion. Two hundred and fifty-eight (258) who demonstrated enthusiasm towards participation were involved in the study after all. Fifty (50) were aged

between 12-14 years (26 boys, 24 girls), one hundred and eighty-three (183) aged between 15-17 years (89 boys, 94 girls) twenty-four (24) aged between 18-20 years (14 boys, 10 girls) while one (1) aged between 21-23 years (1 girl). One hundred and twenty-nine (129) students in each of public and private schools were respondents of the study.

Three instruments were utilised in the study. English Language Screening Achievement Test (ELSAT) was standardised with reliability co-efficient of 0.72 and used to measure English proficiency. Achievement Test of Oral English (ATOE) was developed by the researchers with internal consistency reliability of 0.84 and used to test content mastery of oral structure and Academic Motivation Questionnaire (AMQ) was developed by Regina Shia (1999) and used to find out intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors with internal consistency reliability of 0.91. The data collected from the administration of the instruments were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Independent t-test and Multiple Regression Analysis.

## Results

**Research Question One:** Does learners' motivation predict Oral English performance among high-ability students?

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Showing the Relationship Between Learners' Motivation and Oral English Performance Among High-ability Students**

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	p-value	Remarks
Learners' motivation	41.6860	10.99196	258	.541*	.000	Sig.
Oral English Performance	63.3566	10.62213				

\* Sig. at 0.05 level

Table 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between learners' motivation and Oral English performance among high-ability students ( $r = .541$ ,  $n=258$ ,  $p (.000) < .05$ ). This implies that learners' motivation predicts Oral English performance among high-ability students in the study.



**Research Question Two:** Does gender predict Oral English performance among high-ability students?

**Table 2: Independent t-test Showing the Difference in the Oral English Performance of Male and Female High-ability Students**

Oral performance	English	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	p value
Male		129	63.2804	11.1489	1.96	0.097	256	.923
Female		129	63.4106	10.2698				

Table 2 reveals that there is no significant difference in the Oral English performance of male and female students (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 0.097, DF=256, p (0.923)>.05 level of significance). This means that gender does not predict Oral English performance among high-ability students.

**Research Question Three:** Is there any significant joint contribution of learners' motivation and gender to Oral English performance among high-ability students?

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Joint Contribution of Learners' Motivation and Gender to Oral English Performance Among High-ability Students**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
.541	.293	.288	8.96558			
A N O V A						
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	8499.863	2	4249.931	52.872	.000	Sig.
Residual	20497.331	255	80.382			
Total	28997.194	257				

Table 3 indicates the contribution of the independent variables (Learners' motivation and Gender) to the prediction of the dependent variable (Oral English performance) among high-ability students. It is also indicated in the table a coefficient of multiple correlation (R = .541 and a multiple R<sup>2</sup> of .293. This means that 29.3% of the variance has been accounted for by the predictor variables. The significance of the contribution was tested at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The table also shows that the analysis of variance for the regression yielded F-ratio of 52.872 (significant at 0.05 level). This implies that learners' motivation and gender jointly predict oral English performance among high-ability students.

**Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis Showing the Relative Contribution of Learners' Motivation and Gender to Oral English Performance Among High- ability Students**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig. p
	B	Std. Error	Beta Contribution		
(Constant)	42.147	2.777		15.179	.000
Gender	-.392	1.134	-.018	-.345	.730
Learners' motivation	.524	.051	.542	10.283	.000

Table 4 reveals the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable, expressed as beta weights, viz: Gender ( $\beta = -.018$ ,  $p (.730) > .05$ ), and Learners' motivation ( $\beta = .542$ ,  $p(.000) < .05$ ). Therefore, it could be deduced that learners' motivation is significant. This mean that the variable independently and significantly predicts Oral English performance among high-ability students in the study. However, the difference between male and female high-ability students' motivation in predicting Oral English performance is not significant in the study.

### Discussion of Findings

The finding confirms the fact that motivation plays a major role in students' academic work and achievement. The role of motivation could be seen from two different perspectives: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically motivated learners engage in an Oral English activity for its own sake because they find working on the task enjoyable. They are curious about the content and they feel challenged by the learning activities. This assertion is in agreement to what Ames (2002) established, reporting that intrinsic motivation was positively correlated with learning achievement. Conversely, high-ability learners can be extrinsically motivated to engage in an Oral English activity when they believe that working on the task will result in desirable outcomes such as reward, good grade, parents' and teachers' approval, avoidance of punishment to mention but a few (Peklaj and Levpusek, 2007). Students who are extrinsically motivated could perceive external gain that comes with the Oral English work, task or assignment. They believe the only thing they can do is to put in extra efforts in order to achieve their objectives.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have implications for Oral English performance. This supports Ryan and Deci's (2000) assertion that both forms of motivation have a significance in both developmental and educational practices. Intrinsic motivation remains an important construct, reflecting the natural human propensity to learn and assimilate while extrinsic one reflects on external control or true self-regulation. Garn and Jolly (2014) noted that students are extrinsically motivated when they are externally propelled into action while intrinsic motivation is positively related to students' learning achievement (Weighfield and Eccles, 2000). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are a contributing factor to Oral English performance among high-ability students.

For motivation to be a propelling force among high-ability students, teachers of Oral English who are effective should prepare audio, visual and audio-visual materials to improve the oral skills of the learners in class. They can achieve this by incorporating technological aids into their



teaching. This submission corroborates Ghaedi and Jam's (2014) finding in which teachers are encouraged to give students tools such as enough input, practice and metalinguistic awareness to learn English language proficiently.

The finding reveals that gender does not predict Oral English performance among high-ability students. Gender is said to be one of the main predictors of human behaviour as disparity in the levels of achievement between schoolboys and girls has been observed and reported in literature over the years. The linguistic factors responsible for sameness in oral structure attainment level between the two sexes have been attributed to equal opportunity to learn in the classroom. The present finding is tandem with that of Amaechi, Nwazuoke, Ezeanochie and Babatunde who reported that gender, in the creative ability among students recognised as having high ability, is insignificant. This simply means that exceptional boys and girls do not differ in the possession of creative ability. High-ability male and female students who are exposed to Oral English lessons demonstrate equal level of performance.

Matud, Rodriguez and Grande (2007) equally averred that there is no difference in female and male high-ability students' creative performance. The current study corroborates the above submission. Gender does not play any active role in influencing Oral English performance among the students. The present study, however, contradicts the results of Ariyo and Ugodulunwa (2007) whose report laid claim to gender having a significant predictive impact on students' academic performance. The authors found that boys and girls possess differential abilities because boys are found superior in numerical aptitude, science reasoning and spatial relationship. Meanwhile, girls are said to be superior in verbal fluency which happens to be an integral part of Oral English.

The finding indicates that the joint contribution of learners' motivation and gender to the prediction of Oral English performance is significant among high-ability students. The significance of the two variables implies that motivation of male and female learners is highly important in their performance in Oral English. Summary of the Regression Analysis of the study shows that motivations is more significant than gender, as clearly indicated by the beta weights. In other words, learners' motivation, as a variable, independently and significantly predicts Oral English performance, whereas gender does not among high-ability students. The present finding is in agreement with what Adelodun and Asiru (2015) found when the authors reported that self-efficacy predicts but gender does not predict high-ability students' performance in English discourse (essay) writing.

However, current study is in contrast with the report of Adeyinka (2005) and Adeagbo (2004) who affirmed that boys generally do better than girls in school subjects which include English Language (Oral English). Boys and girls are found to be motivated the same way in the present study and that is the reason why their performance in oral English does not differ. This finding also negates Sood's (2006) report that females exhibit more significantly high motivation than males, as the author asserted that children consider reading socio-culturally as a preserve of girls. It is however believed, based on the finding of the present study, that high-ability male and female students who are equally intrinsically and extrinsically motivated are bound to record almost same performance level in Oral English structure. The present finding is also different

from that of Kember (2004) who remarked that the verbal ability of girls over boys contributes greatly to the former's language development in terms of speaking more fluently.

### **Conclusion**

Learners' motivation as a variable of interest in this study has shown that Oral English performance among high-ability learners is attainable if the construct is properly in place. The foregoing indicates that Oral English performance by high-ability students will enable them to communicate well, articulate their points in the course of interaction more intelligibly, and possess oral skills that distinguish them from their contemporaries regardless of their gender. The implication is that better results will be recorded by high-ability students. These include having upper hand over average and low-ability students at interviews, social acceptance and leadership qualities.

### **Recommendations**

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

Teachers need to be more open to extrinsic motivation of high-ability students. They should find out external rewards that can encourage or stimulate the students in helping them have a positive attitude towards Oral English regardless of marks allocated to the aspect of English.

High-ability students should be self-motivated in order to translate their potential into demonstrated performance in Oral English. Intrinsic motivation in the subject area will enable them to devote their time and channel their energy to making expected gains in terms of excellent performance in Oral English. Parents of the students should try as much as possible to motivate their high-ability children by making provision for their learning.

Digitalised instruction and materials should be sought and got by the parents to enhance the children's motivation level. The government has a lot to do for high-ability students in Nigerian schools.

Specialised training and ability-enhancing Oral English instructional packages should be considered for the students by the Ministry of Education. This is required at this juncture because the students do not really benefit from the regular curricular provisions. This purposeful and impactful gesture is bound to foster the interest of the students in Oral English and socio-economic advantage of this to the nation is quite high.



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