

Influence of Gender on Learners' Retentive Performance in Literary Appreciation Using Reciprocal Peer Learning Approach

(Pengaruh Gender terhadap Kinerja Retentif Peserta Didik dalam Apresiasi Sastra Menggunakan Pendekatan Pembelajaran Sebaya Timbal Balik)

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Abstract: The persistent challenge of poor retention and comprehension among students in literary appreciation has continued to attract the attention of educators and researchers. Many learners struggle to sustain long-term understanding of literary concepts due to the teacher-centered instructional methods commonly employed in classrooms. This problem has raised concerns about how to improve students' engagement, comprehension, and retention through more interactive and participatory teaching strategies. In recent years, the reciprocal peer learning approach has emerged as a promising method that encourages collaboration, active participation, and shared responsibility among learners. However, questions remain about whether gender differences influence the effectiveness of this approach, especially in language and literature learning. The study used a quasi-experimental pretest posttest non-equivalent control group design involving intact classes assigned to experimental and control groups. Conducted in Anambra State with 65 Senior Secondary Two students, it assessed the effect of Reciprocal Peer Tutoring on Literature in English achievement and retention. Data were collected using a validated and reliable test administered as pretest, posttest, and retention test. Analysis using mean, standard deviation, and ANCOVA determined the effectiveness of the teaching strategies on students' performance. Results showed that male students had a posttest mean score of (65.12) with a standard deviation of (11.05), while females scored (64.32) with a standard deviation of (12.61). Their mean retention scores were (74.71) for males and (71.77) for females, with retention gains of (9.59) and (7.45), respectively. This indicates higher retention among males. The ANCOVA result revealed an F-value of (0.469) and a p-value of (0.130), which exceeded the (0.05) significance level. Hence, there was no significant difference between male and female students' mean retention scores using the reciprocal peer tutoring strategy. The study concludes that active participation, mutual support, and peer interaction foster better comprehension and memory retention among learners. It recommends that teachers adopt reciprocal peer learning approaches to promote equitable learning outcomes and gender inclusivity in the study of literature.

Keywords: Gender, Retention, Literary Appreciation, Reciprocal Peer Learning, Academic Performance

1. Introduction

Many schools continue to face challenges in improving students' retention of literary concepts after instruction. Although reciprocal peer learning has been shown to enhance students' understanding and recall of ideas, there is still limited evidence on how gender influences this outcome. Some studies suggest that boys and girls respond differently to peer learning methods, while others report no significant variation. These inconsistencies make it necessary to examine how gender affects the ability of learners to retain and recall literary knowledge when reciprocal peer learning is used as an instructional approach. Reciprocal peer learning involves learners working together in pairs or small groups to teach one another through discussion, questioning, and explanation (Low et al, 2023). Each learner takes turns

explaining ideas while others listen, correct, and summarize key points. This process encourages active participation, which has been linked to improved memory and comprehension in literature classes. Studies show that students who learn through peer interaction often retain information better because they are more involved in the learning process and engage in deeper thinking about the material (Tiong et al, 2022).

Gender has long been an important variable in educational research, especially in language and literature studies. Several findings indicate that girls tend to perform better in reading and comprehension-based subjects, while boys may excel in analytical and reasoning tasks (Säälik, 2015). However, in the context of literary appreciation, performance can be influenced by classroom interaction, interest, and engagement levels rather than gender alone. Research by Taylor (2014) revealed that girls often demonstrate stronger verbal expression and reflection when interpreting literary texts, which contributes to better retention of ideas discussed in class. The same study noted that boys tend to prefer independent reading and may not always benefit equally from group discussion activities.

Peer learning structures that promote equal participation have been found to minimize gender differences in achievement. A study by Ajai and Imoko (2015) found that both male and female students achieved higher retention scores when taught literature through reciprocal peer learning than those taught with conventional lecture methods. The researchers observed that students in mixed-gender groups benefited from shared perspectives and peer explanations, which improved long-term understanding of literary themes and character analysis. Similarly, Muszkat et al, (2014) reported that gender had no significant effect on students' retention of prose and poetry when taught through reciprocal peer discussion, suggesting that the method supports both genders equally.

Despite these findings, some studies have recorded slight variations in how boys and girls retain information in literature classes. Tran (2014) found that female students outperformed males in retention tests conducted two weeks after instruction using peer learning. The researchers attributed this difference to girls' stronger communication skills and their willingness to engage in collaborative learning. Boys were found to participate less actively in some sessions, which reduced their recall of key literary concepts. However, other researchers argue that when roles are well distributed and each learner is assigned specific responsibilities during peer sessions, the influence of gender becomes negligible (Takeda & Homberg, 2014).

Another factor that may influence gender-related outcomes is the type of literary text. For example, stories that reflect themes of heroism or adventure may motivate male learners, while texts dealing with relationships or emotional experiences may engage female learners more strongly. A study conducted by Egara & Mosimege (2023) found that gender differences in retention were smaller when students were allowed to choose texts that interested them during peer learning activities. This finding suggests that learner motivation and text selection play an important role in how much information is retained after instruction. Several researchers have also noted that reciprocal peer learning enhances social confidence and communication skills, which further support retention across genders. When learners explain concepts to peers, they reinforce their understanding and recall of the material. Bowles and Brindle (2017) observed that male students who initially showed low retention in literature improved significantly after being assigned leadership roles in peer learning sessions. This implies that participation structure and teacher monitoring are important in ensuring that both genders benefit equally.

Most studies generally affirm that reciprocal peer learning enhances the retention of literary concepts more effectively than traditional teacher-centered methods (Ohamobi & Onyekazi, 2021; Low et al, 2023). However, the extent to which gender influences this improvement remains inconclusive. Some researchers argue that gender differences in retention are minor and often arise from students' engagement patterns or confidence levels rather than inherent learning capacities (Manafa et al, 2020; Ajai & Imoko, 2015). In contrast, other findings indicate that male and female learners may respond differently to collaborative tasks depending on the nature of the literary texts and classroom interactions (Egara & Mosimege, 2023; Stella & Ifunanya, 2017). This suggests that teachers should design inclusive peer learning environments that promote balanced participation and equal opportunities for idea exchange among genders. In a related study, Onuselogu et al, (2015) emphasized the importance of fostering cooperative learning that transcends gender biases, encouraging tolerance and mutual respect among students. The need to examine the influence of gender on learners' retentive performance in literary appreciation using reciprocal peer learning therefore arises from these inconsistent findings. While peer learning has proven effective in improving comprehension and retention, research exploring gender as a moderating variable within literary contexts remains limited and warrants further investigation.

Some researchers report that female learners tend to retain literary knowledge better than males due to stronger verbal and reflective abilities, while others found no significant gender difference when peer learning was properly structured (Tai et al, 2017; Gok (2014). This inconsistency suggests that contextual and instructional factors may influence outcomes, yet these relationships remain underexplored. Furthermore, most available studies focus on immediate achievement, with limited attention to delayed retention (Chang, 2017). There is also a paucity of research integrating gender, retention, and reciprocal peer learning within literature classrooms in Nigerian secondary schools. Addressing this gap will provide understanding into whether both male and female learners benefit equally from interactive learning strategies, thereby helping teachers to design gender-responsive and retention-oriented instructional practices in literary appreciation.

1.1 Objective

The mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy.

1.2 Research Question

What are the mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy?

1.3 Hypotheses

There is no significant difference between the mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy

2. Method

The study adopted a quasi experimental research design, specifically the pretest posttest non equivalent control group design. In this design, the research subjects were not completely randomized. Instead, intact classes were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group was taught using the Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) learning strategy, while the control group received instruction through the conventional teaching method. The design included three stages of assessment: a pretest to measure initial

performance, a posttest to evaluate learning after the treatment, and a retention test to determine how much knowledge was retained after two weeks.

The research was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The state has six education zones and twenty one local government areas with a total of two hundred and fifty four public secondary schools under the Post Primary Schools Service Commission. Anambra State, with Awka as its capital, was selected because of the high rate of students who patronized external examination centers and the declining interest in reading based subjects such as Literature in English. It was expected that the introduction of Reciprocal Peer Tutoring would enhance students' performance and participation in the subject.

The population of the study comprised eleven thousand six hundred and forty Senior Secondary Two students, made up of five thousand one hundred and thirty five males and six thousand five hundred and five females who were studying Literature in English in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Senior Secondary Two students were chosen because they were not preparing for any major external examination and had already acquired the basic literary skills necessary for understanding the poems used in the study. From this population, a sample of sixty five students, consisting of forty three females and twenty two males, was drawn using multi stage sampling techniques. One education zone was first selected by simple random sampling. Two local government areas were then randomly chosen from the zone. Two co educational schools with qualified Literature in English teachers were purposively selected from the chosen areas and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

The instrument for data collection was the Literature in English Achievement and Retention Test, which consisted of twenty questions developed by the researcher with assistance from experienced teachers. The test contained ten short answer questions on prescribed poems and ten questions on an unseen poem. It was administered as pretest, posttest, and retention test, with slight rewording and changes to prevent familiarity. The instrument was validated by five experts in measurement, curriculum, and literary studies who examined it for clarity, content relevance, and adequacy. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated before the final version was produced. The reliability of the test was determined through a trial administration to twelve students in Enugu State. The analysis yielded a scorer reliability coefficient of 0.68 and a Kuder Richardson reliability coefficient of 0.721, showing that the test was reliable.

For data collection, the regular Literature in English teachers of the sampled schools administered the test. They received one week of training on the study's purpose, content, lesson plans, and the proper use of both teaching strategies. During the experiment, the experimental group was divided into small mixed ability groups of four students each. Members assumed roles as tutor, clarifier, questioner, and summarizer, which rotated in subsequent lessons. The teacher served as a facilitator, guiding the groups and ensuring active participation. The control group was taught through the conventional lecture and question method without group interaction.

To control for extraneous variables, the same teachers, classrooms, and lesson periods were used for both groups. Pretest sensitization was avoided by retrieving all test materials immediately after each session. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions, while hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using analysis of covariance. The null hypotheses were accepted or rejected based on the probability values obtained in relation to the critical value.

3. Results

Research Question: What are the mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy?

The data for answering the research question were analyzed with mean and standard deviation and results presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Posttest and Retention Mean scores of Male and Female Students taught literacy Appreciation using Reciprocal Peer Tutoring

Gender	Posttest			Retention		Retention Gain
	N	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
Male	11	65.12	11.05	74.71	9.26	9.59
Female	20	64.32	12.61	71.77	12.63	7.45

Data in Table 1 show that male and female students taught literary appreciation using Reciprocal Peer Tutoring had Posttest mean of 65.12 with standard deviation of 11.05 while the female had a posttest mean of 64.32 with standard deviation of 12.61. Similarly, the mean retention scores of male and female students exposed to Reciprocal Peer Tutoring were 74.71 and 71.77 respectively with standard deviations of 9.26 and 12.63. The Table further showed that male students had mean retention gain of 9.59 higher than their female counterpart with mean retention gain of 7.45. Therefore, male students had higher retention scores than the females with Reciprocal Peer Tutoring.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy.

The data for testing hypothesis 5 were analyzed with ANCOVA and the results presented in Table 2

Table 2: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Retention scores of Male and Female Students taught literary Appreciation using Reciprocal Peer Tutoring

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	410.516 ^a	2	205.258	1.787	.188
Intercept	5020.601	1	5020.601	43.713	.000
Post test	378.373	1	378.373	3.294	.000
Gender	53.904	2	53.904	.469	.130
Error	2871.341	28	114.854		
Total	136314.000	31			
Corrected Total	3281.857	30			

Data in Table 2 show a Probability-value of 0.130 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This means that the hypothesis of no significant difference was accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the mean retention scores of male and female students in literary appreciation when taught with reciprocal peer tutoring strategy.

4. Discussion

The results from the analysis of research question showed that reciprocal peer tutoring strategy had positive effect on male and female students' retention of literary appreciation. It

specifically indicated that Reciprocal Peer Tutoring had more increasing effect on the male students' retention of literary appreciation than the female students. In other words, male students had slightly higher mean retention than their female counterparts. The result further showed from the analysis of hypothesis that the difference in the mean retention for male and female students was not statistically significant. The findings agreed with Abdurraheem et al. (2017) who found out from their study on the effect of peer tutoring and gender on students' achievements and retentions in Economics that male students taught using the strategy had higher mean retention than the female. Also, the findings agreed with Nawaz and Rehman (2017) who reported that male students had higher mean retention than the female students when taught mathematics using peer tutoring strategy. The slight low mean retention shown by the females against their male counterpart could be due to the belief that most female students are highly distracted from their studies at the adolescent age as much of their attention goes to their body hygiene.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the influence of gender on learners' retentive performance in literary appreciation using the reciprocal peer learning approach. Findings revealed that both male and female students benefited positively from the strategy, as indicated by improved posttest and retention scores. Male students recorded slightly higher mean retention scores and gains compared to their female counterparts, suggesting a marginal advantage in retention when exposed to reciprocal peer learning. However, the difference in their retention performance was not statistically significant, implying that gender did not play a decisive role in determining learners' ability to retain knowledge in literary appreciation. The results demonstrate that the reciprocal peer learning approach is an effective instructional method for enhancing students' understanding and retention, regardless of gender differences. This suggests that when learners actively engage with peers in a supportive learning environment, they develop better comprehension and long-term memory of literary concepts. Consequently, teachers should be encouraged to adopt reciprocal peer learning strategies in teaching literary appreciation to promote equitable learning outcomes and improve students' retention abilities. The study concludes that reciprocal peer learning fosters inclusivity and enhances the overall quality of literary instruction without gender bias in performance.

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