

Performance Differences and Gender in Kiswahili Creative Writing: A Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Nyamira County, Kenya

by

Charles N. Moochi, Margaret Barasa, Isaac P.O. Ipara
(Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya), Ogata B. Rose, Anakalo Shitandi
Division of Research & Extension, Kisii University College, Kisii, Kenya

Abstract

This study investigated comparative differences in performance among boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing in selected secondary schools in Kenya. The study was carried out in Nyamira County in Kenya located at a GPS of 0.5210° S, 34.9140° E. Simple random sampling, cluster and systematic sampling techniques were used to select the students. Ten secondary schools were used in the study and the sample comprised 180 students (on an equal distribution of boys and girls.). The research instrument was a Kiswahili creative writing task. The form 4 students were required to perform a task which involved writing an essay in Kiswahili. To reveal the sex differences in Kiswahili creative writing, the two-tailed t-test was used. The sex differences were considered significant if they were more than the critical value (t-critical: 2.576) at $p < .01$ based on 178 degrees of freedom. The study revealed that girls outperform boys in overall performance in Kiswahili creative writing, style and spelling conventions whereas the two sexes remained at par in content presentation, vocabulary use and use of grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing. In light of the above findings, the researcher generally recommends that students should be provided with remedial teaching to improve their performance in Kiswahili creative writing and a sex unit be established in the department of languages to monitor the progress of boys and girls among other many recommendations.

Key Words: Kiswahili, boys, girls, writing, language

Introduction

Past studies have shown that there are differences in writing as a language skill between boys and girls. Chase (2011) has observed that several studies have established a relationship between sex and writing quality. Malecki and Jewell (2002) cited in Chase have averred that girls write more than boys. Chase has also echoed the same when he states that girls write longer essays than their male counterparts and that length contributes to essay quality. However, it should be noted that studies carried out in other countries do not reveal the same. Klassen (2002) cited in Chase (2011:22) has revealed that males and females do not differ in their writing performance. A study done by Pajares and Valiante (1999) cited in Chase (2011) established that there were no significant differences between boys and girls in writing performance yet girls were rated as “better writers” than boys.

This study was guided by two biological theories based on the hemispheric organization; Brain Lateralization Theory and Prenatal Hemispheric Theory. The main objective of the study was to compare the performance of secondary school boys and girls in creative writing in Kiswahili in Nyamira County, Kenya. Other objectives of the study included: to find out whether: there is any difference between boys and girls in: the presentation of content in creative writing in Kiswahili; style in creative writing in Kiswahili; use of appropriate vocabulary in creating writing in Kiswahili; ability to correctly use grammatically elements in creative writing in Kiswahili and the mastery of spelling conventions in creative writing in Kiswahili.

Statement of the Problem

The Kenya National Examination Council, Kiswahili Composition Examiners and Secondary schools Kiswahili teachers had opined that girls outscore their male counterparts in Kiswahili creative writing. Their opinion was based on holistic rating approach. This study delved into differences in performance, if any, between boys and girls in the five elements of creative writing namely: content, vocabulary, grammar, style, spelling as well as overall performance. Further, it aimed at revealing whether or not the differences are significant. This is critical to bridging performance disparity between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing, Kiswahili composition and Kiswahili language. Consequently, this is expected to contribute to reaching gender parity in educational outcomes.

Research Questions

The study attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- a) Are there any difference in performance between boys and girls in creative writing in Kiswahili?
- b) Are there any differences between boys and girls in the presentation of content in creative writing in Kiswahili?
- c) Are there any differences between boys and girls in terms of style in creative writing in Kiswahili?
- d) Are there any differences between boys and girls in the use of appropriate vocabulary in creative writing in Kiswahili?
- e) Are there any differences between boys and girls in terms of their ability to correctly use grammatical elements in creative writing in Kiswahili?
- f) Are there any differences between boys and girls in the mastery of spelling conventions in creative writing in Kiswahili?

Research Hypotheses

There were six non-directional hypotheses for this study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference in performance between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the presentation of content between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Ho₃: There is no significant difference in writing style between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Ho₄: There is no significant difference in the use of appropriate vocabulary between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Ho₅: There is no significant difference in terms of ability to correctly use grammatical elements between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Ho₆: There is no significant difference

Literature Review

Three schools of thought have been advanced to account for gender differences in verbal tasks. The first school of thought is that the differences in educational outcomes are caused by nature. According to Rhoads (2004) the differences evident in educational outcomes are caused by biological factors. The second school of thought is that the differences are attributed to socialization. (Jha and Kelleher, 2006. P. 70-71). The advocates of this school of thought consider environmental factors as the causes of differences in learning outcomes. The third school of thought is a combination of the nature and environmental (social) factors. Thus, the advocates of this school of thought are interactionist. They accept and consider both biological and environmental factors as the causes of the differences (Mondoh, 2002; Basow, 2010). This study employed biological theories because the social factors do not show why differences in educational outcomes are not observable until the age of ten plus. Moreover, the proponents and advocates of the social factors do not explain why girls predominantly use their left hemisphere of the brain for language functions.

According to Chase (2011. P. 3) writing ability plays an important role in students' learning. Bangert – Downs, Hurley and Wilkinson (2004) cited in Chase (2011) have also underscored the importance of this skill when they say that: the act of writing creates an environment of cognitive and organizational strategies. The ability to write has been considered as a requisite for success in any academic discipline besides being a lifelong skill (K.I.E, 2006).

Chase (2011. P.5) has observed that: 'students have difficulties with the actual act of writing words and ideas on paper'. Adeyemi (2008. P.3) has averred that: 'students find composition writing dull, laborious and uninteresting and rather avoid it if they could'. These views point to the fact that the writing skill is full of difficulties.

Hubbard and Stygall (1992) assert that there are substantive gender based differences in creative writing. Chase (2011 p.22) says that; 'girls tend to write longer essays than boys and that length has a positive association to essay quality'. Allan and Pease (2001. P. 80) have also echoed the same when they write that: buying a card is never a problem for a man, it is what is to write inside that stamps him.

Research that have been done within the area of gender and composition writing (creative writing) have revealed that there are significant differences between girls' and boys' performance. Adeyemi's (2008) study revealed significant differences between boys and girls in composition writing. The two tailed t-test revealed that female students outscored their male counterparts in composition writing.

It is important to mention that the existing literature on sex and ability in composition writing point to differing results. In some countries the results have indicated that there are no significant differences between girls and boys in creative writing as evidenced by a paired t-test. Pajares and Valiante's study, cited in Chase (2011. P.21) revealed that there were no significant differences regarding gender and writing yet asserts that girls are 'better writers' than boys. The same has been underscored by Klassen (2002) who is also cited in Chase (2011). He established that males and females do not differ on their writing performance.

The revelation of significant differences in performance between girls and boys in some countries and the absence of the same in others militates against drawing a blanket conclusion about the universality of girls' superiority in composition writing in every country. This requires carrying a study in every country. This requires carrying a study in every country to establish whether or not there are significant differences between boys and girls in creative writing. Additionally, there are various aspects considered when rating a creative writing task. Gathumbi and Masembe (2008) have categorized these aspects into two groups; basic and advanced. The basic writing skills are: good hand-writing, correct spelling and right punctuation. The advanced writing skills include: grammar, style, organization among others. This makes it necessary to consider boys' and girls' overall performance in creative writing and in specific examinable skills.

Despite the fact that there abundant and increasing literature on sex differences in creative writing, in Kenya there is no empirical research on this. The only available findings are based on the girls' and boys' performance in language in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination analysis. K.N.E.C. (2006) indicates that girls do better than boys in Kiswahili in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. K.N.E.C. (2006) has not shown whether or not there is a significant difference between boys and girls in overall performance and Kiswahili creative writing. As a result, this study aimed at comparing the performance of boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing to find out sex disparities in ability, if any, in a Kenyan context.

Methodology

Study Area and Sample

The study was conducted in Nyamira District of Nyanza Province in Kenya located at a GPS of 0.5210° S, 34.9140° E. The study comprised 180 form four students drawn from 10 secondary schools. The district had 80 secondary schools with a population of about 16,700 students. The researchers employed simple random sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling techniques respectively to get the 180 students. The decision to use form four was in recognition of two factors. These were; syllabus coverage and the students' preparedness to take the Kenya certificate of Secondary Education Examinations.

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was a Kiswahili creative writing task. The respondents were given an adage, “Patience pays” and they were required to write a composition which was rated analytically. The research instrument was constructed and developed by the researchers after consulting subject specialists at Moi University and the Kenya National Examinations Council, Kiswahili Composition exam setters and examiners

Study Population

The study utilized students who were boys and girls. There were two strata based on sex. It was assumed that all of them had been taught Kiswahili creative writing and that they had done ‘enough’ exercise in the same. Consequently, it was assumed that all the study students were ready to perform the research task.

Data Collection Procedures

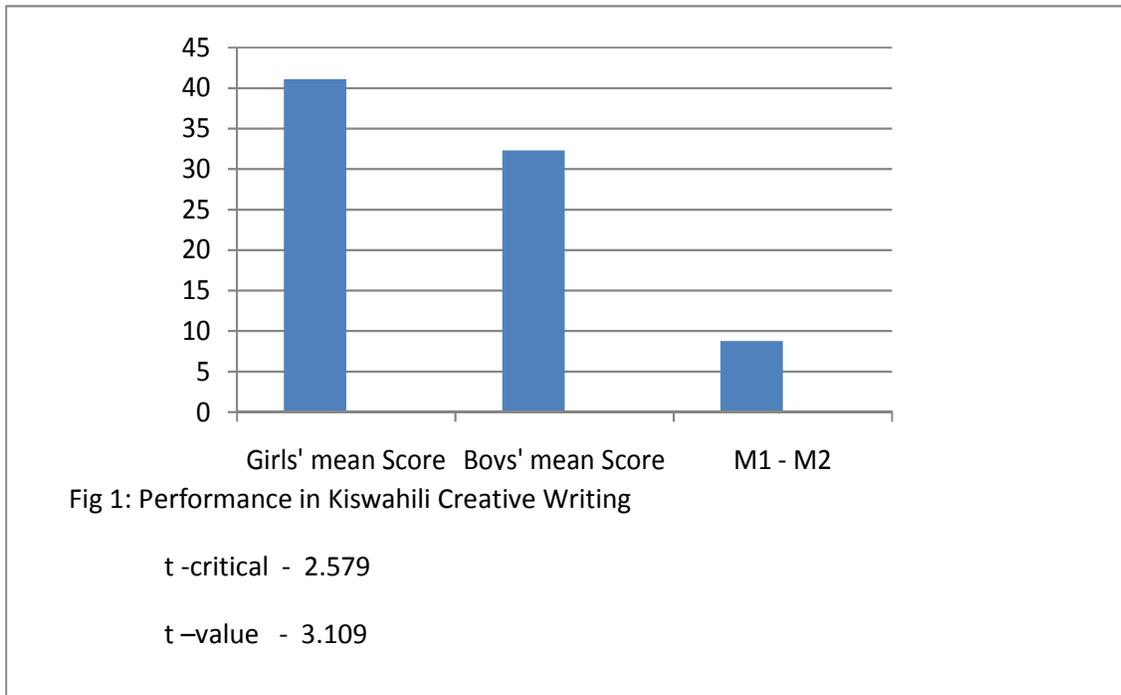
Students of the sampled schools and streams were given a Kiswahili composition to write. The task took one hour and twenty minutes. The Kiswahili teachers of the sampled schools assisted the researchers in supervising the exercise. Each student was issued with a question paper, two foolscaps – one for a rough draft and the other one for the final copy was handed in for ‘rating’. Each subject was instructed to fill two pages of foolscap. Before handing in the fair copy, each student was required to indicate his/her sex using abbreviations which were indicated on the question papers. Before the rating exercise began, there was a training session for all the raters. This was done after sampling the two strata based on sex, each with 90 students. The samples scripts were scored using the analytic method. The marks for each stratum provided data for the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

To assess the statistical significance of the mean score differences between boys and girls in each facet, the two – tailed t-test was used. The sex differences were considered statistically significant if they were more than the critical value (t-critical: 2.576) at $P < 0.01$ based on 178 degrees of freedom.

Results

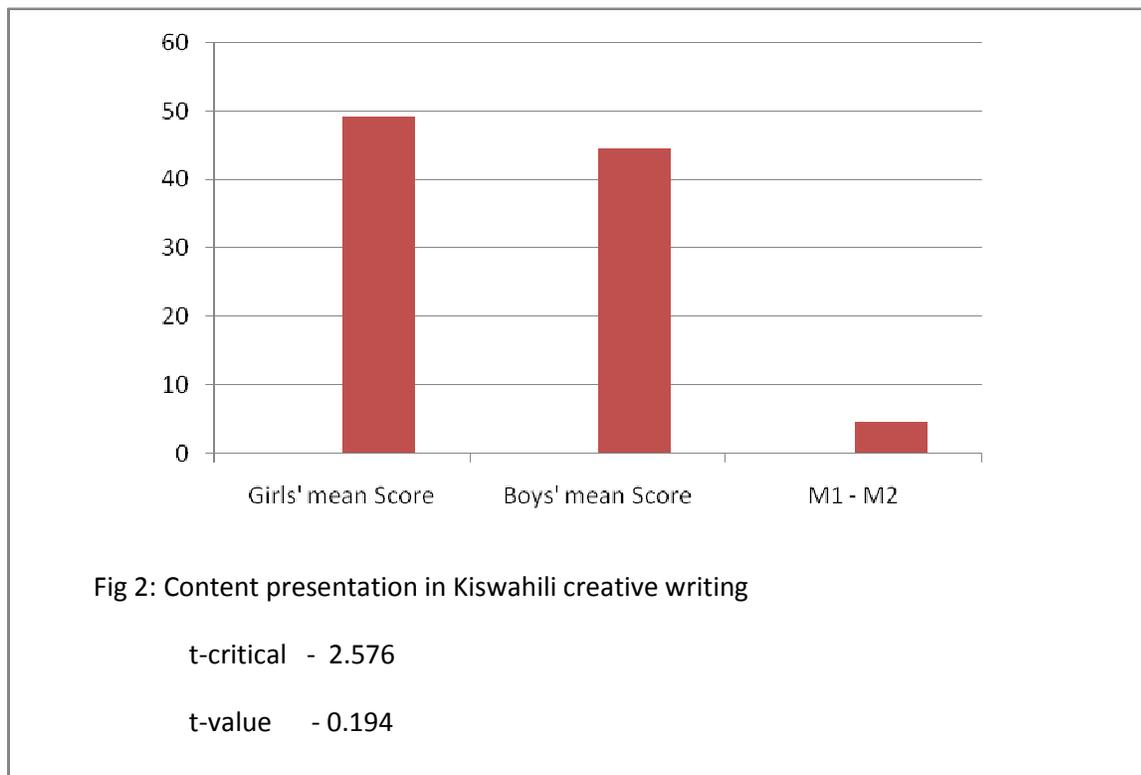
Performance in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

Examination of figure 1 indicates that the hypotheses: H_0 : “There is no significant difference in performance between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing”, was rejected since the t value was greater than t – critical. This shows that there is significance in performance between boys and girls and this was in favor of girls.

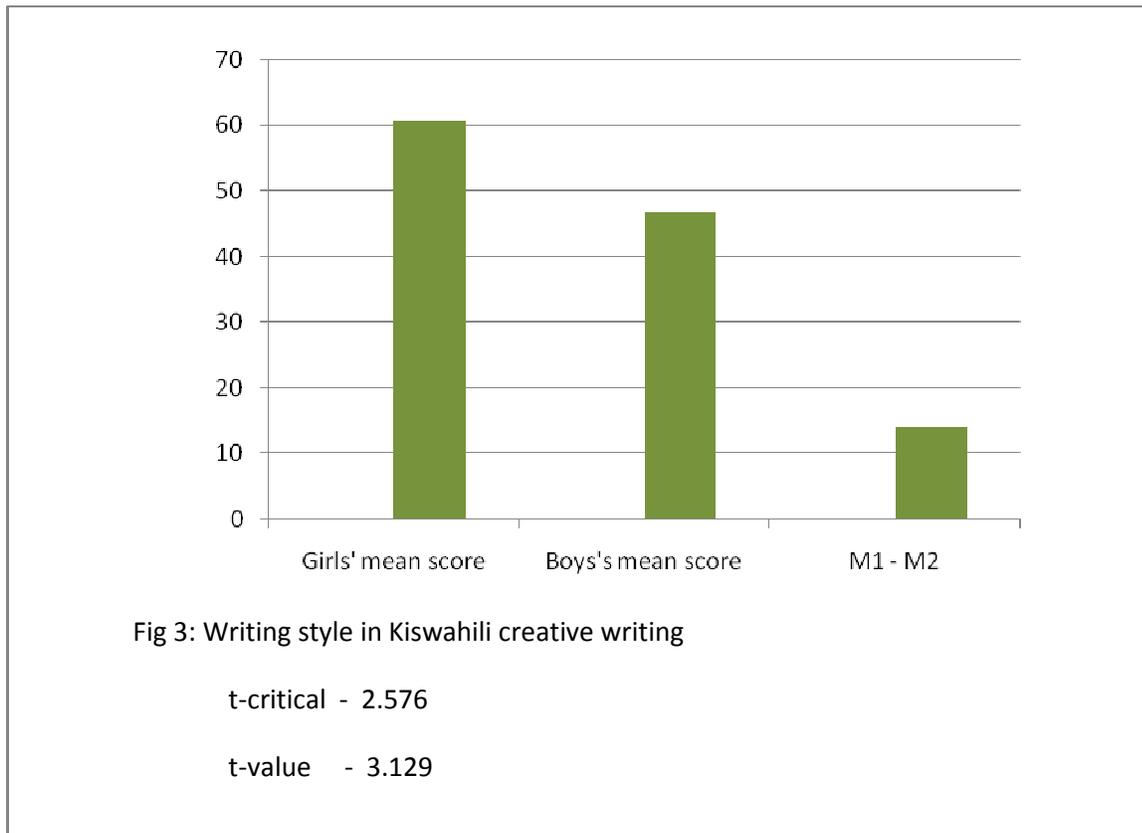
Content Presentation in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

Figure 2 shows that the hypothesis H_{02} : “There is no significant difference in the presentation of content between boys and girls in Kiswahili creative writing”, was retained because the t value (0.194) fell in the acceptance region. Thus, there is no significant difference between boys and girls in the presentation of content in Kiswahili creative writing.

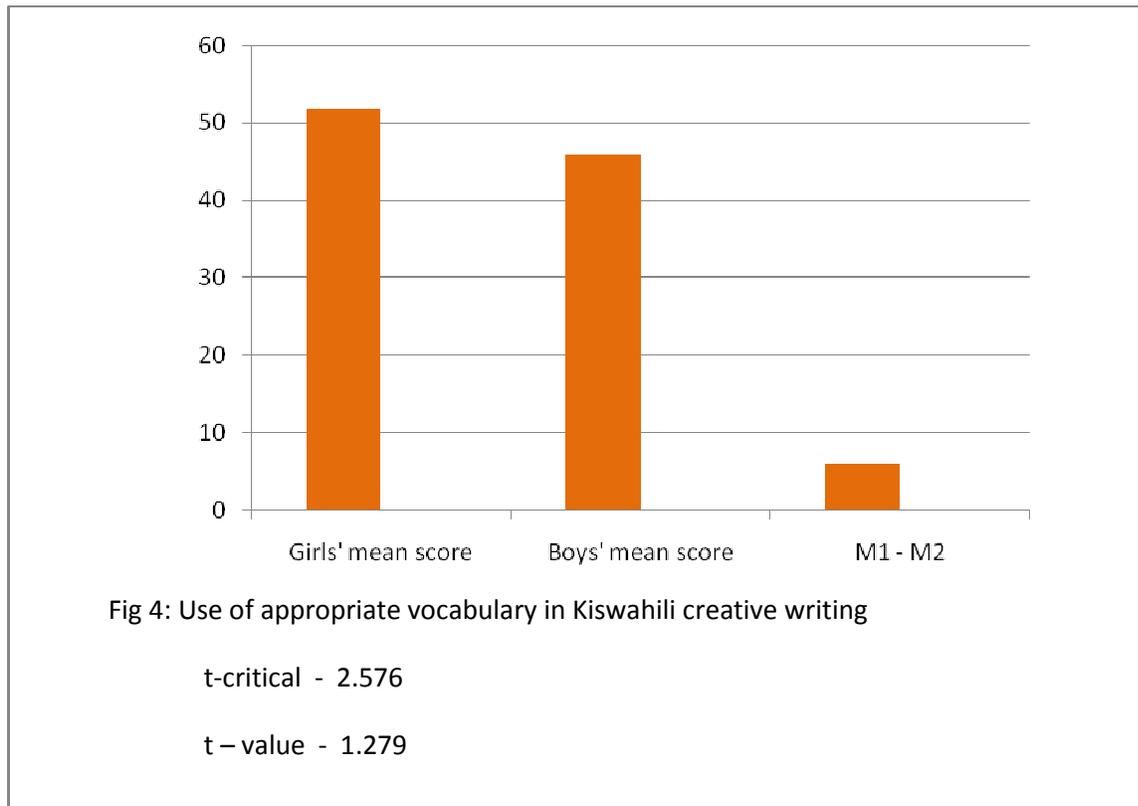
Writing Style in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

As it can be seen from figure 3, the hypothesis: H_03 : “There is no significant difference in writing style between boys and girls in Kiswahili Creative writing” was rejected. This is because the t value (3.125) was greater than the t-critical hence making the t value to fall in the rejection region. Consequently, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in writing style between boys and girls and that the difference reveals that girls outperform boys in this dimension.

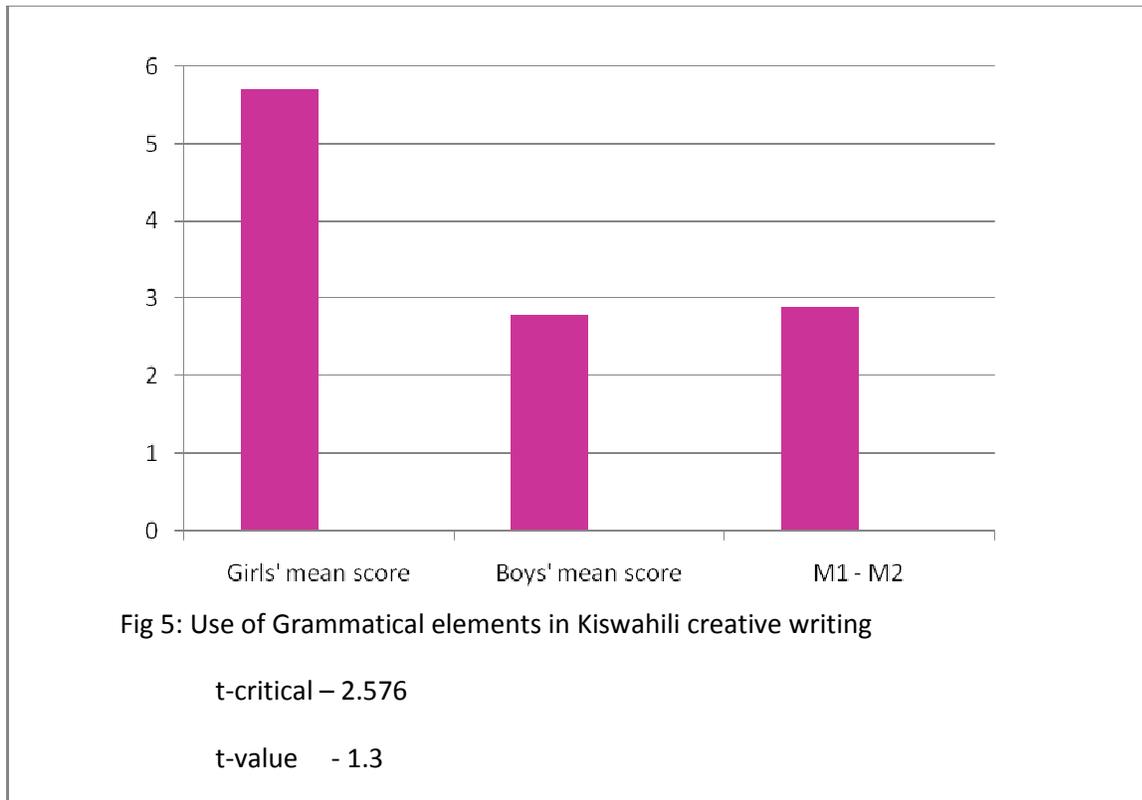
Use of Appropriate Vocabulary in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

Fig 4 shows that the value (1.279) was less than the t-critical (2.576). This implies that the t value fell in the acceptance region. This led to the acceptance of the hypothesis: H_{04} : "There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the use of appropriate vocabulary in creative writing in Kiswahili". Therefore there is no significant difference between boys and girls in the use of appropriate vocabulary in Kiswahili creative writing

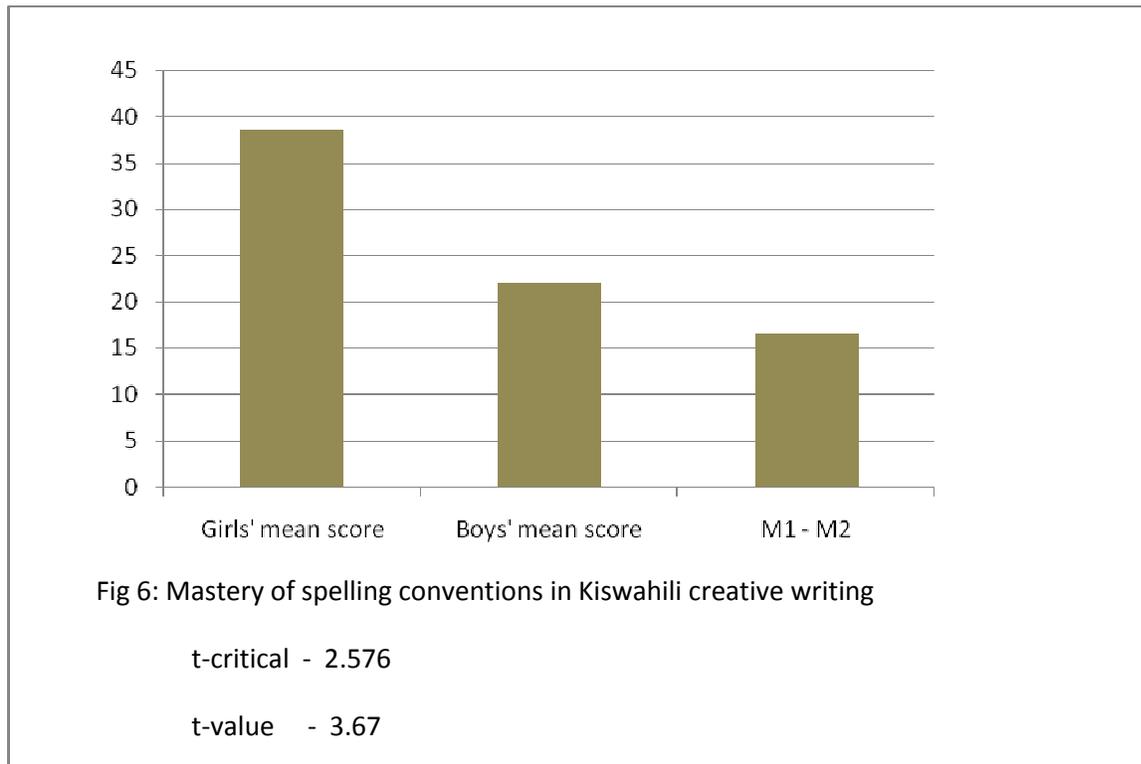
Use of Grammatical Elements in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

Fig 5 shows that the hypothesis: H_{05} : “There is no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of ability to correctly use grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing” was retained. This is because the t value (1.53) which was less than the t-critical (2.576) fell in the acceptance region. This leads to the conclusion that there is no significant difference between boys and girls in ability to correctly use grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing.

Mastery of Spelling Conventions in Kiswahili Creative Writing



Criterion level $P < 0.01$

From figure 6, it can be seen that t-value (3.67) was greater than the t-critical (2.576). This meant that t-value fell in the rejection region. Thus, the hypothesis H_0 : “There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the mastery of spelling conventions in Kiswahili creative writing” was rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mastery of spelling conventions and this was in favour of girls since they obtained a higher mean score than that of their male counterparts.

Discussion

This study revealed significant differences in three areas, namely:

- performance in Kiswahili creative,
- writing style and
- Mastery of spelling conventions in Kiswahili creative writing.

Girls surpassed boys in these three dimensions. On the contrary, there were no significant differences in the following areas: content presentation, use of appropriate vocabulary and ability to correctly use grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing. The differences will be discussed below in turns.

The first significant difference was in performance in Kiswahili creative writing and this was in favour of girls. In the same vein, this confirms Gathumbi and Masembe (2005) observation that sex characteristics bear upon the way different people respond to writing tasks. Therefore, although the early findings were based on other languages and cultures, the same holds for Kiswahili creative writing.

The second significant difference was in writing style in Kiswahili creative writing. The fact that girls outscored boys in this element implies that girls use several figurative devices such as metaphors, similes, proverbs, idiomatic expressions among others in their creative tasks. On the other hand, boys seem to use less figurative devices. Somewhat this makes them to perform poorly in this dimension. This finding is not novel; it is consistent with what Chase (2011) has observed. Coates has observed that at any given age girls have the facility to handle complex expressions. The finding from which this observation is drawn was based on English. Besides that, it relied mostly on spoken language. Thus, it can be concluded that although the early findings were based on various contexts, the same is observable in Kiswahili creative today.

Finally, there was a significant difference in the mastery of spelling conventions in Kiswahili creative writing. Girls' superiority over boys is indicative of their mastering the spelling conventions. This finding is consistent with early findings which indicate that girls are superior to boys in this facet (Adeyemi 2008).

Conclusions

It was concluded that Girls have higher ability in creative writing in general, style in creative writing and in the mastery of spelling conventions and that Both girls and boys have the same ability in content presentation, use of appropriate vocabulary and correct use of grammatical elements in Kiswahili creative writing

Recommendations

From the consulted literature sources and the primary data gathered for the study and based on the findings, the following recommendations are made.

- Teachers of Kiswahili should pay attention to the elements that give students difficulties and take the necessary measures to get rid of these difficulties. For instance, instead of the Kiswahili composition instructors employing impressionistic (holistic) method in rating the compositions of students, they should use analytic and error-count methods which enable both the learners and teachers to identify and beware of elements that pose difficulties in Kiswahili creative writing.
- Errors identified via the use of the error-count and the analytic methods of grading should be the basis of remedial teaching.
- Seminars/workshops should be held by the Ministry of Education to alert teachers to the sex differences in Kiswahili creative writing.
- To improve the boys' performance in Kiswahili creative writing, teachers should encourage healthy competitions between boys and girls.
- Curriculum developers should re-examine the subject matter currently used in teaching the writing skill and the instructional methods in use.

Further Research

In the course of the study it was identified that other areas need the attention of researchers and the following topics have been listed to guide future researchers in this respect.

The area of sex differences and Kiswahili creative writing still has some gaps that warrant further in- depth research. Consequently, it will be useful if studies are carried out to find out why:

- Girls excel in Kiswahili creative writing and particularly in creative writing style and mastery of spelling conventions.
- Girls use more figurative devices in their creative tasks than their male counterparts.
- Girls seem to have good handwriting.
- Boys' essays are generally shorter than those of girls.
- Boys make a lot of cancellations (crossing off letters words, sentences etc.) in their creative tasks.
- Girls have a predilection for creative tasks.

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