

CONSIDERATION OF GENDER-FAIR EXPRESSIONS IN DEVELOPING WRITTEN TEXTS: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO FOUR UNIVERSITIES IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Currently foreign language learning in general, writing skills development in particular has strong role in solving social problems in the society. Learner-centered writing classes where the principles of modern communication are implemented through active teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction, a number of deep-rooted misconceptions established in the society for time immemorial can get at least rudimentary remedial solutions. Accordingly, the major objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which both writing instructors and students endeavoured in alleviating gender-biased dictions on both impromptu and extemporaneous essays produced for a variety of purposes. The study was designed largely in harmony with the principles of quantitative method. Consequently, the researcher decided to employ sample essays written by the students and questionnaires administered to both Advanced Writing Skills course instructors and students who were taking the course as major data gathering tools. For the purpose of triangulation, however, semi-structured interviews conducted with both writing instructors and students were used as additional data collecting tools to get qualitative data. In like manner, 58.3 % of the sample essays which were written by the students consisted of male referenced topics such as “Everyone has **his** own way”. In using pronouns, 66.6% of the essay writers used masculine pronouns (he/him) more frequently to represent both sexes. Similarly, while they were using common nouns, 82.5% of the writers did not give attention to appropriate gender-fair expressions that suit both sexes. In further investigation, 75.8% of the writers preferred to select male major characters such as Haile Gebresillassie, Tilahun Gessesse, Haylom Araaya, PM Meles Zenawi, inter-alia., in their biographical essays. The other mind striking finding was that 80% of the respondents utilized the occupation titles such as engineer, pilot, president, etc., to refer to only males. When we look into the data from the instructors’ questionnaire, 50% of them confirmed that they did not frequently guide their students how they had to use appropriate gender-fair expressions when they produced various types of essays. In the same way, the data from students’ questionnaires revealed that instructors of the course did not give any guideline as to how they had to use appropriate gender expressions. Further, the data collected through interview indicated that most writing instructors considered gender-unfair expressions on students’ writing as merely a problem of diction. In conclusion, the issue of gender in the course, Advanced Writing Skills classes in four of the universities selected for this study, has not yet got full attention.

KEYWORDS: Diction, Gender-Fair Expressions, Neutralization, Occupational Titles

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Writing is one of the important language skills which have multidimensional advantages in different aspects of human life. Among its several contributions, the role it plays in promoting the academic performance of students is underscored by a large number of scholars repeatedly. Despite the fact that writing is an indispensable language skill before and after school life of students, studies conducted subsequently revealed that it is not easy to develop it as it is often vulnerable to such factors as psychological, cognitive and linguistics. Furthermore, the difficulty of writing skills is attributed to such factors as the method of instruction, the kind of teaching materials, beliefs and perceptions of the instructors on the current theories and practices, the class-size, the interest of the learners to augment their writing proficiency, the time given for practicing, inter-alia.

The first approach to writing instruction, that is, the product approach, geared towards almost exclusively on mechanics, commonly referred to today as conventions. The major purpose of writing was to enable learners produce error-free texts. During this period, the behaviorists' view of language teaching, which thought learning as an action of stimulus and response in the learner was influential Widdodo (2006). The other pedagogical phase is characterized as a paradigm where the writer is at the center of attention in the teaching/learning process. The core idea of the philosophy of the school was that the only man who has brought behavioral change is the man who learned how to learn; the man who learned how to adapt and change; the man who realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives basis for security. Therefore, the role of the teachers, based on this school of thought, is to carefully follow up what writers do in the process of developing a given text and give them comments to write better.

However challenging writing skill is to develop, as long as the students have interest to learn and improve their skill and instructors are well aware of the notions of current theories and practices and are determined to implement them successfully, studies conducted on students' compositions subsequently revealed that improving the writing skills of students is not as such the most complicated issue of the ESL/ EFL practitioners.

When we look into the theoretical frame-work of modern approaches to writing instruction, they encourage writers to produce sexist-free written texts. In link to this, Scay and Scott (2004:2) further explain the point saying: "Very well written materials are those which treat gender issues fairly and respectfully." In their further explanation they pinpoint that gender fair materials broaden students' attitude about gender roles and increase motivational values in their day-to-day performance. Hence, students' engagement in the whole process of writing and the skill of the teacher in guiding the students to produce not only clear and meaningful written texts but also to give attention to gender-fair texts makes the whole instruction successful. In this regard, Borich (2000:17) suggests the following most significant behaviors of a competent writing instructor: lesson clarity, instructional variety, gender-fairness in developing teaching materials,, students' engagement and success rate.

Based on his every day observation and experience in teaching various writing courses at college and university level, the present researcher encounters a large number of written texts comprising gender-biased expressions. The problem is pertinent not only to university students but also to certain administrative bodies of Hawassa University who use English in rare occasions for specific purpose of organizational communication. Surprisingly, under some circumstances, female students themselves are observed diminishing themselves by using gender-unfair terms on various written texts that they

produce for various purposes. If this trend continues as it is, females always remain as passive and subservient to their male-counterparts. The present researcher, thus, decided to investigate the extent to which gender-parity is given attention during the teaching/learning of writing and the actual development of various written texts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the extent to which gender-fairness is given due attention on both impromptu and extemporaneous essays of students in four Ethiopian universities.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are to:

- examine whether Advanced Writing Skills instructors guide their students to use gender-fair expressions when they get them develop both impromptu and extemporaneous essays
- identify the type of frequently used gender-unfair expressions on students' essays
- identify the factors attributing to the use of gender-unfair expressions (if any) on students' essays

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Gender issue is still one of the most divisive issues of the day almost across the world. Both fairness and unfairness can appear in any discipline or work places. Unless this hurdle is alleviated step- by- step through modern education, the performance and contribution of females in the process of building a country will be over-ridden. Consequently, the findings of this study will help writing instructors at any level to reconsider their limitation and take remedial measures. Secondly, those experts who are working on gender issue, can look into the findings and consider the written texts they produce whether they are free of such biases. Thirdly, teaching material writers at any level of learning can ponder on the findings and manage to make their texts free from expressions which bring about gender disparity. Finally, other researchers who have interest to conduct further research in this area can use the findings as spring board.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is designed at large quantitatively (experimentally). Nevertheless, for the purpose of triangulation, qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews were used. To this effect, essays written by 120 students were taken as sample to evaluate the extent to which they satisfy the modern approach to gender-fair approach. Secondly, 40 writing instructors, i.e. 10 instructors from each university were selected to respond to the questionnaires. Finally, 2 writing instructors from each university were selected to respond to semi-structured interviews.

DATA SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

To determine the number of students who produce essays which were required for analysis of gender issues, one of the modern data sampling models developed by Israel 2009 was used. Accordingly, 120 students, i.e. 30 students from each university, were selected. Among the selected students, some of them had already taken the course Advanced Writing Skills and others were taking the course while they were producing the essays for this research. In determining the sample

size of the respondents to the questionnaires, 30% of the whole population from each university, i.e, 30 students, were selected. Finally, 2 respondents among instructors of the course and 4 respondents among students from each university were selected to respond to the semi-structured interviews based on the principle of data saturation model. As has been mentioned above among the students who were selected for the semi-structured interviews, some of them had already taken the course mentioned above and the rest were taking the course while the present researcher was collecting the data for the study.

DATA COLLECTING PROCEDURES

Before the students had begun writing the essays, the researcher discussed the purpose of writing the essays with each instructor of the course Advanced Writing Skills in each university. The main point of the discussion was on the procedures that the course instructor and I need to follow in getting the students write their essays. He then went to the class and asked his students to produce any impromptu essay of 300 words by passing through different stages of writing i.e. idea generation, drafting, reviewing and producing the final draft within one hour. After the students had finished writing the essays, he collected them and handed them in to me. With regard to the administration of questionnaires to Advanced Writing Skills instructors, the first draft was provided to colleagues especially to those who have experience in offering the course, for comments, suggestions and amendments. Having done this, the items were revised and reconstructed depending on the comments made on each item. Then the final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the students. As has already been done on the questionnaire items, the items of the semi-structured interviews were also first reviewed by colleagues and then revised rigorously. Finally, the interview was conducted with each selected interviewee by audio-tape-recording his/her opinions.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

In analyzing the essays written by the students, first each essay was given a code then the sentences which had gender unfairness were underlined. Having done this, each sentence which consisted of gender disparity was classified under such categories as parts of speech, characterization, occupational titles and references. Finally, the raw data were recorded into a table, their frequency was calculated and their implications were discussed. In analyzing the questionnaires, first, the responses for each questionnaire were tallied under similar categories on a ruled sheet of paper then the responses in each category were computed and converted into percentage. Finally the meaning of each category was explained descriptively. In analyzing the data from the semi-structured interviews, first the data were transcribed on a white sheet of paper. The second step was to codify each data. Thirdly, the codified data were converted into various themes. Finally each theme emerged from the codified data was explained based on the objective of the research.

RESULTS

As data collected from four of the universities indicated, the essays that the students wrote for this research limited the role of female students to domesticity and considered them as subservient to males. When we observe the topics selected by the students and generated by the teacher for essays development, more than 50% were male-referenced. For example, "What Makes Man Different from Animals?" This finding implied that majority of the students were not giving due attention to gender-fair expressions on their essays. The other surprising finding with regard to topics selection or generation was that most females themselves generated male-referenced topics. This finding implied that still in the

modern world, females have not yet fully achieved equal recognition. If this kind of trend continues in the same tempo, females, who are our mothers, sisters, wives, aunts can be demoralized to compete with their male counter-parts and achieve success.

When students wrote biographical or narrative essays, most of them, including female students themselves, gave priority to male characters such as Haile Gebresillassie, Haddis Alemayehu, Tadesse Biru, Tilahun Gessesse, PM Meles Zenawi, and others. Similarly, when they wrote narrative essays, most of the characters they sketched were names of males. To avoid unnecessary repetitions, in most essays, a large number of students preferred to use masculine marking pronouns such as (he/him) instead of neutralizing or changing them into plural. This result, as has been discussed above, suggested that females have not yet achieved full equality even among the educated section of the society i.e. university students.

The other result secured from the data analysis was that more than 50% of students used male common nouns such as director, actor, hero, etc., to refer to both sexes instead of saying directress, actress and heroin. In link to occupational titles, most occupations such as president, soldier, engineer, pilot, driver, etc., were given to males. Females were mostly entitled with occupations such as secretary, nurse, teacher, cashier and the like. Moreover, the common nouns such as policeman, salesman, cameraman, fireman, fisherman, man –made, etc., were used to represent females while it was possible to say salesperson, camera-operator fire-fighter, fisher, manufactured, etc. From the above result, it is possible to generalize that the issue of gender issue is still relentless effort seeking area.

In checking whether instructors of the course, Advanced Writing Skills, provide orientation or guide students as to how they use gender-fair expressions, the instructors themselves confirmed that they did not give it due attention like other requirements of effective writing. The main reasons they stated were: considering gender issues as part of diction, lack of awareness about the issue, carelessness, fear in using too many criteria to evaluate the students' writing, giving more focus to content and flow of ideas, and others. From the above result, it is possible to conclude that seminars at university level or inter universities level need to be conducted to exchange experience and alleviate the problem.

When the frequency of gender-unfair expressions was examined, the following results were found out in their descending order: parts of speech, occupations, characters and topics and subtopics.

As the results from the students' questionnaires revealed, vast majority of the students had low perception about the disadvantage of gender-unfair expressions. The major reasons that they pointed out were by and large the same as the above reasons listed by Advanced Writing Skills instructors. In addition, when students wrote their essays, their focus was on the following components in their descending order: coherency of ideas, structure of sentences, contents and mechanical features. We believe that in modern foreign language pedagogy, the focus of any instruction is to enable students communicate successfully. Nevertheless, if the communication does not give room to social values to all groups of people equitably, it will suffer from various setbacks. Hence, attention to fair gender-expression needs to be a component of productive and active writing instruction.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussion of the Essays

When the essays that the students wrote were examined meticulously, many of them consisted of contents which

can frustrate females. As researchers in the area repeatedly disclose, the gender disparity depicted in any literature or textbooks, gradually widens the difference between males and females. This perception in turn affects the confidence and the overall active participation of females. One of the essays written by one student in one of the universities, for example, is read as follows:

.... Tsehay woke up early in the morning and first laid the bed. Then, she went the toilet room. After coming back from the toilet, she washed her face and hands with water. She, then, entered the cooking room and lit the kerosene stove to make tea. Until the tea boiled, she went to the nearby shop to buy loaves of bread. When she came back, from the shop with the bread, the tea had already boiled.. Then she took off the tea-pot and went to the bed room to awaken her older brother. Sisay, to go to the toilet room, wash his face with water and soap and take his breakfast with her. In the same way, he did what he is always accustomed to. Finally, she washed the glasses with which they drank tea and then they both went to school saying by to their parents.

From the above incomplete essay titled “Job Share at Home”, we observe that most of the sentences explain that most of the house activities are left to the female, Tsehay. As we understand from the essay, the older brother has not had any significant contribution in the housework. It is she who accomplished all the house-chores from the beginning to the end. Her brother was ready only to wash his face and hands, eat his breakfast and go to school with her. He did not even help her in washing the glasses with which they drank tea. When the above essay is examined carefully, this type of attitude has two impacts on female students. The first one is that it makes them consider themselves subservient to males and always be confined to domesticity. As a result, females always think that higher achievement is the manifestation of males. Secondly, the larger portion of the time that female students spend on house-chores encroaches up on their time that should have been used for their academic progress. Therefore, it is possible to conclude from the above data that this type of trend and practice results in stereotypic image by establishing wrong impression about feminism into their socio-cultural origin.

Table 1: Gender-fairness in Constructing Titles for Essays

No	Item	Frequency	%
1	Male Referenced	70	58.3
2	Female Referenced	40	33.3
3	Both Sexes Referenced	6	5.1
4	No Sex Referenced	4	3.3
	Total	120	100

As we see from the data given in the above more than average number of students (58.3%) used male referenced titles like “Everyone has his own way”. The other 33.3% constructed female referenced titles such as “No Woman Should be Allowed to Surrogation”. Only 5% of them wrote both sex referenced titles, i.e. either plural nouns or indefinite pronouns. Lastly, 3.3 % of the respondents constructed titles which are neutral. These data takes us to the conclusion that incontestable number of students did not give serious attention to gender-fairness while they were selecting or constructing titles on which they develop essays. This implied that still further orientation and endeavour from the Advanced Writing Skills Instructors is required.

Table 2: Frequency of Pronouns Used and Gender-Fairness

No	Item	Frequency	%
1	Male Referenced	80	66.6
2	Female Referenced	28	23.4
3	Unidentified	12	10
	Total	120	100

The data in the above table indicated that 80 (66.6%) of the respondents who wrote essays for this research used masculine pronouns (he/him) where repetition of common nouns is not required and when human beings in general are referred to. The other 28(23.4%) used feminine marking pronouns (she/her). The rest 12(10%) used unidentified (indefinite pronouns). From this data it is possible to suggest that most students in Advanced Writing Skills classes did not worry about using the most appropriate pronoun which convey their message without offending neither females nor males. In further analysis, the researcher found out that male proper nouns such as Teshome, Abebebe, Zeleke, Birhanu, Gemechu, Yala Kawte, etc., were more frequently used than female proper nouns such as Almaz, Beshadu, Amleset, Zemzem, Hira, etc. When we examine the psychological motive for using such names with some details, the major one was unconscious and conditioned behaviour of most writers which results from the general socio-cultural makeup of the society in which they were brought up. Secondly, Lack of training how to use gender-fair expressions for any context was the other impediment. Thus, though it is challenging to remove all such inappropriatenesses with in a short period of time, all members of the society who are well aware of such abnormalities must play their role and pay the necessary sacrifice because if such tradition continues as it is, the domination of male students over females’ will be pervasively on the scene.

Table 3: Using Common Nouns

No	Item	Frequency	%
1	Male common Nouns	75	82..6
2	Female Common Nouns	20	16.6
3	Unidentified	25	20.8
	Total	120	100

As we can see from the table given above, 75(82.5%) of the essay writers used male common nouns such as directors, actor hero, etc., to represent both males and females while it was possible to use the words directress, actress, heroin, etc., for females. The other 20(16.6%) used the appropriate form of feminine common nouns where the words are required as either subject or object of the sentence. Contrarily, the rest 25(20.8) of the respondents employed unidentifiable pronouns such as indefiniteness makers like “any”, “all”, etc. or plural markers like they, these, those, etc. In conclusion, one can understand from the table that using gender-fair expressions on students’ essays is not the serious concern of most students. As a result, it is possible to suggest that female students have been less considered and forgotten in the course of essays development.

Table 4: The Use of Major and Minor Characters on Biographical and Narrative Essays

No	Item	Frequency	%
1	Male Major Characters	91	75.8
2	Female Major Characters	29	24.2
	Total	120	100

On the basis of the data given in the table above, 75% of the respondents used male major characters on their essays. The rest 29 (24.2%), on the contrary, used female major characters on their essays written for the purpose of this

research. As the table further depicts, most major characters in the biographies and narrations are male proper nouns, such as Tadesse Biru, Haylom Araaya, Abebebe Bikila Pelle, Tilahun Gessesse, Emperor Thewodross, Premier Meles Zenawi, etc. The other surprising finding was that even most of the female students themselves, who involved in essay writing for this research, preferred to narrate about male characters. This kind of attitude is so pernicious that it undoubtedly incapacitates the role and contribution of females in all walks of life.

The other relevant point found out from the essays is that most occupations such as doctor, engineer, soldier, president, pilot, author, driver, etc., were repeatedly used to refer to only males. Only 20% of the essay writers used the above occupations as careers of both females and males. Moreover, the nouns, policeman, salesman, cameraman, fire-man, fisherman, etc., were used as they are to refer to both sexes without making any change in such a way that they reflect both sexes. The above data take us to the understanding that still there is a wrongly established belief which assumes that females do not have the capacity to involve in activities which require high level thinking. The argument is that if the essay writers reflected such attitude on their essays, no doubt they could implement it the same way in the real world.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 5: Guiding Students to Use Gender-fair Expressions

No	Items	No of Res	%
1	I guide them always	3	10.1
2	I guide them sometimes	5	16.6
3	I guide them rarely	7	23.3
4	I do not guide them	15	50.0
	Total	120	100

From the data given above, it is possible to understand that 15 (50%) of the writing instructors did not guide their students as to how they avoid sexist expressions on their writing. The other 5(16.6%) guide them occasionally. Only 3 (10.1 %) guide their students as to how they avoid gender-unfair expressions from their essays frequently. In responding to the open-ended item which requested the respondents to explain the reason(s) for not guiding students to use gender-fair expressions, the frequently given reason was, in any effective written work, considering the content, coherency of ideas, language use and layout was enough. When we examine the above reason, we find a very serious misunderstanding. First of all, the quality of a good writing is its consideration of all human beings as equal creatures in this world. There is a belief that no writing should annoy or frustrate or dehumanize any section of the society. Thus, it is appropriate to suggest that consciously or unconsciously, writing instructors have responsibility in changing the attitude of their students with regard to using gender-fair expressions on their writing.

Table 6: Areas of Gender-biased Expressions on Students' Writing

	Items	No of Res	%
1	Topics and sub-topics	5	16.7
2	Parts of Speech	12	40
3	Occupations	8	26.6
4	Characters	5	16.7
	Total	30	100

As we understand from the above data, most of the gender-biased expressions that most students used belong to parts of speech. The second serious area was when they were writing occupational titles. On the other hand, gender-biased

expressions were less used while the students were writing topics and sub-topics for essays that they produced. The other item required explanation about the advantage of using gender-fair expressions on students' writing. Accordingly, in their response, all of them listed the following: First, it gives a sense of confidence to female students so that they freely struggle to cope with their male counter-parts in the academic world and outside. Secondly, the written works of the students become ethical; consequently, female students gain respectation and develop a feeling of autonomy.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES FOR STUDENTS

Perceptions about Gender Issues on Their Writing

Based on the responses given to the first item of the questionnaire, 104 (86.6%) of the respondents confirmed that they did not have due consideration for gender-issues on their writing. The other 16 (13.3), nevertheless, contended that they were aware of the implication of gender-unfair expressions on their writings. When the respondents were asked to reason out for not having perception about gender-fair expressions on their writing, they stated two comprehensive reasons: The first one was reluctance of writing instructors in orienting them about the appropriate uses of fair-gender expressions. Secondly, students themselves did not give due attention to gender issues while they were producing various texts. In their detailed explanation, majority of them disclosed that they have never discussed the issue of gender issue with friends or read any literature on it to curtail the problem.

The other item of the questionnaire requested the respondents to explain whether there were unforgettable occasions in which they received feedback from their instructor for their inappropriate use of gender expressions on their essays. In response to the item, majority of them confirmed that they did not have any memory about such kind of event in spite of receiving lots of corrections on language use, coherency of ideas, mechanics and the like.

Table 7: Consideration for Gender-Unfair Expressions

No	Items	No Res	%
1	I consider them as very serious problems	30	25
2	I consider them as serious problems	31	25.8
3	I consider them as medium problems	34	28.4
4	I consider them as less serious problems	25	20.8
	Total	120	100

When we examine the above data carefully, we observe that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that considering sexist terms had a medium effect on the overall quality of their writing. This implied that majority of the students were more concerned with other requirements of effective written work than gender issues. The other item of the questionnaire asked the respondents to witness whether they had orientation or discussion in the classroom on gender-unfair expressions and the methods which help them control on their writing. Accordingly, almost all of them confirmed that they did not get such kind of orientation from their Advanced Writing Skills instructor or hold discussions in the class. When they were asked whether orientations or discussions on the use of gender-fair expressions were relevant to produce more quality writing, 81 (68%) of them had the opinion that they would be essential. The rest 19 (32%), however were of the opinion that gender –fair expressions were not as such serious problems in achieving good writing skill. In their belief, it is not the fair expressions on their writing which confirm the equality of female students; rather it is the attitudinal change of each student that he/she brings about which can truly set females free from inferiority, domination and discrimination.

DISCUSSION OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Discussion of the Instructors' Interview

As has already been mentioned earlier, one of the data gathering tools was semi-structured interviews conducted with 8 Advanced Writing Skills instructors and 16 students selected from four of the universities identified as study site for this research. The respondents to interview were not involved either in filling in the questionnaire or writing the essays. The main assumption was that if new respondents are selected, new opinions might be secured which have not been considered by those respondents who wrote essays or filled in the questionnaires. Accordingly, the most significant themes of the discussion are presented as follows:

Criteria Used to Evaluate the Students' Essays

In responding to the item which asked them to explain the major criteria that they use in evaluating their students' written work, all of them listed the following in their order of significance: coherency of ideas, structure of sentences, content, mechanical features and diction. The above data revealed that "diction" is one of the criteria in evaluating the students' essays. Though gender-fair expression was not mentioned vividly, the course instructors, as the present researcher thinks, might give it room under diction.

Relevance of Gender-Fair Expressions

Four of the respondents had the belief that gender-fair expressions can increase the quality of any writing in different ways. One of the respondents, for example, stated his view saying:

If students are inhabited to employing words or expressions that do not offend any part of the society, they will develop a sense of responsibility and thoughtfulness to others. On top of this, it helps to avoid the chauvinistic feeling of males over females. I feel that if gender equality is well recognized by the young scholars at universities, the wrongly established gender-biased attitude can be uprooted from our country once and for all.

From the above opinion we make out that the instructor had the belief that considering gender-fair expressions while producing various genres is of multidimensional advantages.

Guidance Given to Students on the Use of Gender-Fair Expressions

As the data indicated, 3 of the respondents responded frankly that they did never give guidance as to how their students avoid sexist expressions from their writing. In their further discussions, they presented the following reasons: Firstly, in evaluating any written text, there are a lot of requirements that should be taken into account. If such issues as gender expressions are considered, students do not focus to produce meaningful written texts so that they become accuracy-oriented writers. One of the Advanced Writing Skills instructors, for example, opinioned, "I did not learn such things while I was taking this course in a university. Why are you worrying now with such complicated things? For me, there are gender offices which are responsible to accomplish such activities."

The above response reminded me one saying, which goes as "What is learnt at cradle stays up to the tomb". Of course, we all know that we are the result (product) of our teachers. However, accepting everything that we got from them and implementing as it is betrayal of change and innovations. Secondly, as the respondent said, though there are gender offices established in each Ethiopian universities to solve some gender issues, sharing responsibilities and working

collaboratively is one of the modern approaches to progress and change. In sum, updating our thinking and keeping ourselves abreast of the current innovations as best as possible is an indication of maturity and far-sightedness.

Solutions Suggested as Remedy to Alleviate the Use of Gender-biased Expressions

The salient remedial solutions suggested by the respondents are summarized and presented as follows: changing the wrongly established socio-cultural miss-conception of the society through education by using various media and social gatherings, including the issue of gender-fairness as an independent topic in school curricula, motivating students to read various literatures and conduct research in the area, holding discussions on the issue in classrooms and outside are among others.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDENTS' INTERVIEW

Perceptions about Gender-Fair Expressions on Essays

As the data from the interview indicated, among 16 respondents 14 of them had the feeling that sexist expressions do not bring as such serious impact on the quality of their writing. When they further explain their reasons, they stated that all writing instructors were teaching them unity, coherency and adequacy of ideas as essential components of good writing. In their final conclusion, they remarked, no writing instructor had ever taught them the relevance and methods of using gender-fair expressions in any of their writing classes. Four of them, however, were of the perception that gender-fairness is one of the essential requirements in producing well developed written text. One of the respondents reinforced his opinion saying: "If I do not demonstrate my respect for gender equality on my writing, I am indirectly degrading myself because I am the result of my mother."

In conclusion, as explained in the discussion of instructors' questionnaires, the perception of majority of students about the use of gender-fair expressions is not in line with modern approaches which advocates sexist-free literatures.

Awareness about Language Areas Connected with Gender-Expressions

The data showed that 10 of the respondents could not list down the most care needing areas of language in explaining matters connected with gender issues. The other 8 tried to call few them. Only one respondents listed as follows: pronouns, common nouns, male referenced nouns, and occupational titles, character-sketching. These data take us to the conclusion that students can use various expressions which result in gender-disparity on their essays.

Decision on Selecting a Character for Biographical Essays

As explained in discussing the data from essays, 13 of the respondents selected national heroes that they appreciate them due to their magnificent contribution during their life-time. The other two respondents, one male, another, female selected female characters such as Princess Taitu, Derartu Tulu, Tirunesh Dibaba, and the like. Here the point that should be taken into account is everyone has right to write about the hero that he/she loves. Unfortunately, a heroin may not be found in some countries. The point of argument is unless we Ethiopians take initiation and bring out the major activities that our heroin committed, who will take the responsibility to do so? We repeatedly hear that behind or at the side of any success or achievement, there is one female. So why we always talk about males and overshadow the contribution of our half flesh unreasonably.

Selection of an Occupation after Graduation

First, the researcher gave them a piece of paper on which different occupations were listed. Then, the respondents were asked to choose one of them as a future career in case they do not get the type of work they need after graduation. The list of occupations were: teacher, secretary, heavy-truck driver, modern farmer, military-in-chief, businessperson, mechanic, and factory-worker. Accordingly, the 2 female respondents among the total number of 18 respondents, selected secretary and business person. Among the male respondents, 5 of them selected heavy truck driving and 7 of them factory-worker. Lastly, the two male respondents decided to become mechanics. As we can see from the above data, latent occupational labour division was reflected. In further interview conducted with the female respondents, the researcher came to learn that they did not have ambition and courage to become heavy truck drivers and military-in-chiefs. Their reason was the misconception deep-rooted in the society for long period of time by building a discriminatory occupational labour division between males and females. As a result, the students were forced to reflect the reality they experienced on their writing as a member of the society.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussions and analyses made in this study, the following conclusions are drawn.

- When one of the essays written by the respondents is examined carefully, it hardly gave attention to gender-fair expressions. As studies reveal, when females read such type of essays, they consider themselves subservient to males and always be confined to domesticity. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that student writers need clear guidelines from their instructors which can help them alleviate gender-disparity expressions on any written texts that they produce for various purposes.
- In selecting a titles for essays, (58.3%) of the students used male referenced titles like “Everyone has his own way”. The other 33.3% constructed female referenced titles such as “No Woman Should be Allowed to Surrogation”.
- When we examine the frequency of pronouns used in the essays, 80 (66.6%) of the respondents used masculine pronouns (he/him) where repetition of common nouns is not required and when human beings in general are referred to. The other 28(23.4%) used feminine marking pronouns (she/her).
- In link to the use of common nouns, 75(82.5%) of the essay writers used male common nouns such as directors, actor hero, etc., to represent both males and females while it was possible to use the words directress, actress, heroin, etc., for females. The other 20(16.6%) used the appropriate form of feminine common nouns where the words are required as either subject or object of the sentence. Contrarily, the rest 25(20.8) of the respondents employed unidentifiable pronouns such as indefiniteness makers like “any”, “all”, etc. or plural markers like they, these, those, etc.
- In selecting characters for their essays, 75% of the respondents used male major characters. The rest 29 (24.2%), on the contrary, used female major characters. The other relevant point found out from the essays is that most occupations such as doctor, engineer, soldier, president, pilot, author, driver, etc., were repeatedly used to refer to only males.

- From the data in the questionnaire, 15 (50%) of the writing instructors did not guide their students as to how they avoid sexist expressions on their writing.
- Most of the gender-biased expressions that most students used belong to parts of speech: the second category belong to occupational titles.
- Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire, 104 (86.6%) of the respondents confirmed that they did not have due consideration for gender-fair expressions on their writing.
- Majority of the respondents were of the perception that considering sexist terms had a medium effect on the overall quality of their writing. This implied that majority of the students were more concerned with other requirements of effective written work than
- As the data from writing instructors demonstrate, all of them used the following criteria in their order of significance to measure their students' written work: coherency of ideas, structure of sentences, content, mechanical features and diction. The above data revealed that "diction" is one of the criteria in evaluating the students' essays. Though gender-fair expression was not mentioned explicitly, the course instructors, as the present researcher thinks, might give it room under diction.
- Regarding the relevance of gender-fair expressions, four of the respondents had the belief that gender-fair expressions can increase the quality of any writing in different ways.
- As the data indicated, majority of the respondents explained frankly that they did never give guidance as to how their students avoid sexist expressions from their writing
- To alleviate gender-disparity expressions, the salient remedial solutions suggested by the respondents are: changing the wrongly established socio-cultural miss-conception of the society through education by using various media and social gatherings, including the issue of gender-fairness as an independent topic in school curricula, motivating students to read various literatures and conduct research in the area, holding discussions on the issue in classrooms and outside are among others.
- In conclusion, the perception of majority of students about the use of gender-fair expressions is not in line with modern approaches which advocates sexist -free literatures.
- In response to their awareness about most attention seeking gender-fair expressions, 10 of the 18 respondents disclosed that they did not have any idea about them.
- In selecting a character for biographical essay, 13 of the respondents selected male characters that they appreciate them due to their magnificent contribution during their life-time.

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