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Gender Issues in Classroom Interaction and Students' Achievement in Social Studies

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Abstract:

This study examined gender issues in secondary school students' participation in classroom interactions and their achievement in social studies in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Descriptive design of the survey type was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 1500 JSS 2 Social Studies students. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample. Two instruments used for this work were observational instrument titled Classroom Interaction Analysis Categories (CIAC) and Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT). The CIAC was an adapted version of Flanders (1970) while the SSAT was a self-constructed test designed to measure students' achievement. Test-retest technique was used to determine reliability of the instruments. Data collected were subjected to hypotheses testing using student t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed a significant difference between the level of participation of male and female students in classroom interactions and that the difference between the achievement of male and female students in Social Studies was significant. Based on these findings, it was recommended that teachers should ask higher order questions, initiate interactions and distribute questions evenly in order to encourage equal participation of the two sexes in classroom interactions.

Keywords: social studies, classroom interaction, gender, participation, education for all

1. Introduction

Gender is a global issue that generates concern and has led to a lot of research works. It is described in various ways by different people based on different perspectives. Haralambo and Halbon (2000) define gender as the socially unequal division of people into masculine and feminine. This unequal division has made women through the ages suffer all sorts of deprivation. The phenomenon is further compounded in Nigeria and Africa where society fixes gender roles and conditions for males to play and act within the confinement of intellectually and physically more challenging tasks while the women are 'sentenced' to the kitchen and related domestic chores (Popoola, 2011). In order to tackle the problem of inequalities, Education for All (EFA) Declaration was signed in 1990. One of the EFA goals according to Falase (2004) is to improve all aspects of quality education and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all. The EFA declaration was later reaffirmed in the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000 (Beshel, 2008). In pursuance of these objectives, the Nigerian government launched Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in September, 1999. The UBE made it compulsory for children aged 6-15 years to remain in school uninterrupted that is basic 1-9. To achieve the EFA goals, it is deemed necessary to access students' activities and performance especially in the core subjects like Social Studies and find out if male and female students are given equal learning opportunities to ensure excellence and measurable learning outcome.

However, Akinde (1995) claimed that female constitute about half of the human resource and hence the girl-child needs to be educated. She stressed that it is not that girls are not intelligent and not able to do well but they are able to perform excellently if provided the opportunity to compete with the boys. Studies reviewed showed that there are conflicting results of findings on performance of male and female students in various subjects. Daramola (1992) investigates study behaviour and achievement motivation of gifted students at Suleja Academy in Nigeria. The study revealed that both sexes received equal encouragement to use fully their intellectual gifts and that gifted girls did not differ from gifted boys in study behaviour and achievement motivation. Henderson & Henderson (1994) opine that higher education is male oriented with a strong discrimination against female; Fagbemi (1996) observes that the achievement motivation of females in higher education is lower than that of males while Oyedeji (1996) found a significant gender-group difference in favour of boys in science. In another study, Adesoji & Fisuyi (2001) found that more girls than boys had difficulties in problem solving as 63% of the girls could not reason out solution to some volumetric analysis problems. Kwasi & Azeez (2008) reveal lack of progress for women in science, technology and mathematics education as their findings revealed gender disparity in enrolment and graduate turn out.

On students' performance in Social Studies, Akinbote (1999) found that there was no significant difference in the cognitive achievement of boys and girls in Social Studies. In Adeosun (2002), findings showed that girls recorded higher achievement mean scores than the boys. Adeyemi (2008) reveals that boys had higher achievement mean scores than girls in the cooperative and conventional strategies groups while the girls had an edge over the boys in the problem solving strategy group. Abdu-Raheem (2010) found that there was no significant difference between the mean post-test score of male and female students in each of the experimental and control groups.

Effective classroom interaction takes place when teacher engages students through higher order questions, class discussion, group discussion, identification and interpretation of instructional materials, asking questions and seeking information. Students' participation is determined by teacher's competency in ensuring that all students are involved in interaction. Kounin & Gump (1994) suggest that students should be called on randomly rather than in a fixed order with the teacher making special effort to get around to everyone in the class frequently. Irvine (1986) studies students' initiating behaviour, teachers' verbal feedback and students' available response opportunities in 63 classrooms in relation to student race, sex and grade level. The study indicated that male students initiate more positive and negative interactions with teachers than do female students. Good & Dembo (1993) found that 96% of the teachers who responded to a questionnaire revealed that they preferred to call on low achievers only when they were confident that these students would provide the correct response.

According to Jacobsen, Eggen, Kauchak and Dulaney (1989), a classroom which maintains a large amount of freedom for students to think and weigh alternative solutions appears likely to be a classroom in which students will achieve and value learning. In order to encourage students' active involvement during classroom interactions, teachers should give room for participatory responses under a democratic setting, relinquish control and allow students' verbal activities in form of responses and initiation.

2. Statement of the Problem

The various works carried out in the sciences, mathematics, vocational education and others revealed that male students performed better than female students. This shows that female students still lag behind in some of the subjects taught in Nigerian secondary schools. To this end, this study was conducted to find out if there is any gender disparity in students' participation in classroom interactions and their achievement in Social Studies.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine gender difference in students' participation in classroom interactions and in their achievement in Social Studies.

4. Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were generated for the study:

- Participation of male and female students will not significantly differ in classroom interactions in social studies lessons.
- Male and female students' achievement will not significantly differ in social studies achievement test.

5. Methodology

This study employed the descriptive design of the survey type. A total sample of 1500 JSS Two students were selected for the study. This consisted of 683 male and 817 female students. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample. Two instruments used for this study were an observational instrument titled Classroom Interaction Analysis Categories (CIAC) and Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT). The CIAC was an adapted version of Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (1970) while SSAT was a self-constructed instrument. The CIAC was divided into three sections that contained teacher's activities (verbal and non-verbal), students' activities (verbal and non-verbal) and miscellaneous. Some teachers' and students' verbal and non verbal behavioural activities were added to the original version of the instrument to make it suitable for the study. Fifteen vertical columns were provided for each activity for two minutes interval observation. The SSAT was made up of 40 multiple-choice items based on the four major topics contained in the JSS II Social Studies curriculum for second term.

Test-retest technique was used to determine reliability of the SSAT and CIAC which yielded 0.74 and 0.71 respectively. The researcher with the help of some research assistants observed interactions in Social Studies classes twice a week for a period of ten weeks. Occurrences of teachers' and students' activities were coded at two minutes interval for 30 minutes in each class. At the end of the tenth week, the SSAT was administered on the students. Data collected were subjected to hypothesis testing. Student t-test was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

6. Results

- Hypothesis 1: Participation of male and female students will not significantly differ in classroom interactions in social studies lessons.

Variables	n	\bar{x}	sd	df	t cal	Decision
Male	683	23.57	6.51	692	2.405	Significant
Female	817	20.50	8.10			

Table 1: *t*-test analysis on the level of participation of male and female students in classroom interactions
 $P < 0.05$

Table 1 reveals that *t* calculated (2.405) is greater than *t*-table (2.16). The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the level of participation of male and female students in classroom interaction is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference between the level of participation of male and female students in classroom interaction in Social Studies.

- Hypothesis 2: Male and female students' achievement will not significantly differ in social studies test

Sex	n	\bar{x}	sd	df	t cal	Decision
Male	683	46.50	14.95	692	3.003	Significant
Female	817	43.19	14.12			

Table 2: *t*-test analysis on students' gender and achievement in social studies
 $P < 0.05$

Having discovered a difference in the means and standard deviation of achievement of male and female students in Social Studies test, table 2 further shows that *t* calculated (3.003) is greater than *t* table (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the difference between the achievement of male and female students in Social Studies is significant.

7. Discussion

Findings of this study show that there is significant difference in the level of participation of male and female students during classroom interactions. Male students recorded higher mean of 23.57 while the female had 20.50. It implies that male students participated more in classroom interactions than their female counterparts. This finding agrees with Irvine (1986) who indicated that male students initiated more positive and negative interaction than did female students. This might be attributed to teachers' disposition to give more response opportunities to the males than females. Higher male students' participation might also be due to the nature and characteristics of boys which Irvine described as active, salient and perceived by teachers as potentially disruptive. Irvine (1986) stressed that male students are frequently provided response opportunities as a method of maintaining appropriate classroom discipline. Although, the total mean time spent on students' verbal activities was relatively low, it can be said that the little time was dominated by male students answering questions in the class.

The study also shows that there is a significant difference between achievement of male and female students in Social Studies. Male students had higher mean achievement score of 56.50 compared with their female counterparts with a mean achievement score of 53.19. This finding that male students performed better than the female students agrees with the findings of Ogundare (1989) and Adeyemi (2008) but at variance with the findings of Akinbote (1999), Adeosun (2002) and Abdu-Raheem (2010). That male student performed better in achievement tests could be expected since they had higher level of participation during classroom interactions. Students learn better when they participate actively in lessons. As commonly said, children remember what they see or touch well than what they are told. So also, they are not likely to forget responses intuitively given correctly or the repetition of verbal activities made when being corrected on wrong answers.

The study further corroborates the findings of other authors that female students still lag behind in nearly all core causes offered in Nigerian secondary schools. In the light of this, full and active participation of female students is needed for improved performance. There is need to encourage girls/females to be able to participate actively in lessons and compete favourably with the boys/males.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

As revealed by the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is gender disparity in students' participation in classroom interactions and their achievement in Social Studies. Male students recorded higher achievement scores than the females as a result of more response opportunities given them which eventually led to their active involvement in classroom interactions. It can also be argued that female students were not given equal response opportunities like the male students.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Social Studies teachers should learn to distribute questions evenly between the two sexes to encourage more female students' participation.
- All students irrespective of gender should be given equal learning opportunities to aid their participation in classroom interactions and performance in Social Studies.

- Teachers should develop skills in initiating interactions among students and in asking higher order questions. This will assist the students to engage in meaningful interactions that will develop their critical thinking and rational decision making skills.
- While government is canvassing for improved education of the girl child, efforts should be made to encourage and ensure that those in schools develop to the level in which they can favourably compete with their male counterparts if the saying that 'what a man can do, a woman can do better' is anything to go by.

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