

**CLASSROOM DIVERSITY AND STUDENTS'
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL
STUDIES IN OGOJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between classroom diversity and students' academic achievement in Social Studies in the Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to accomplish the objective of the study, two hypotheses were created to provide guidance for the research. The study utilised a survey research design. A total of 230 pupils from the JSS 3 Social Studies class were chosen using a basic random sampling method. The data collection involved the use of a questionnaire on classroom diversity and a Social Studies performance test as the instruments. The tools underwent Face and Content Validity assessment by measurement and evaluation professionals from the Faculty of Education at the University of Calabar, located in Calabar. The Pearson product moment statistic was utilised as the statistical analysis tool to test the hypotheses being investigated. Every hypothesis was evaluated using a significance level of 0.05. The results demonstrated a substantial correlation between a curriculum that exhibits gender bias or gender balance and the academic achievement of students in the field of Social Studies. It was suggested,

among other recommendations, that curriculum developers should be educated and made aware of gender issues and how they affect the education of girls. Furthermore, it is imperative for local government councils to establish legislation that prohibits parents from pressing early marriage on their daughters.

Keywords: Classroom diversity, Social Studies, Gender, Curriculum, Students' performance.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation characterised by its heterogeneous population and many cultural traditions, boasting a wealth of cultural legacy. Consequently, the task of educating the heterogeneous population of Nigeria has significant difficulties for both educators and curriculum developers (Practt, 2016). This is due to the multicultural and pluralistic characteristics of the Nigerian country. There are two main factors to consider. Firstly, the student population in our classrooms is becoming more varied. Secondly, traditional course content has been enhanced by the inclusion of new scholarship on women, cultural studies, and multiculturalism. The convergence of these transformations occurs within the classroom, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that education becomes truly meaningful for this student and for the majority who believe that their education was not designed for them. This includes women from diverse backgrounds, individuals of different ethnicities, and men who lack privilege due to their social class. The teacher achieves this by bridging the gap between these two groups. The curriculum issues faced by classroom teachers involve not just integrating many perspectives into the curriculum, but also adopting pedagogical strategies that prioritise the inclusion of students' voices as a means of learning, rather than merely regulating or controlling them (James & Cherry, 2018).

Several nations are currently seeking a robust curriculum that accurately represents the evolving requirements, desires, and

ambitions of both individuals and society. In Nigeria, significant endeavours are undertaken to develop a curriculum that is sensitive to the diverse demands of an evolving society and its citizens, taking into account gender considerations. Policies are implemented to ensure that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, tribe group, religion, sex or gender, and disability, are entitled to education without any form of discrimination. These policies aim to cater to the diverse needs of all learners within the same learning environment (Sambo & Bwoi, 2015).

Education is universally acknowledged as a significant tool for advancing and enhancing the position of women and girls in almost every country worldwide. The recent surge in interest in women's education can be attributed to a worldwide recognition of gender-related concerns (Nwagbara, 2019). Ogunkunle (2009) asserts that a nation can be considered proud and content when it ensures that its students become accomplished and accountable members of society, who actively contribute to the nation's economic development and possess self-assurance. Regrettably, Nigeria is currently facing numerous forms of violence, including socio-cultural, physical, political, economic, psychological, and ecological violence, with a special focus on women. This violence occurs at both personal and societal levels. Additionally, there is a significant underperformance of women or female students across different levels of schooling in Nigeria (Odey, 2019).

The issue of underperformance among female students across all educational levels has been a longstanding concern for education stakeholders in Nigeria. Odey (2019) specifically criticised the overall underperformance of female students in social science courses, like as civic and citizenship education, in the Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State. The technical report examines the academic performance of students in Cross River State. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2019/2021), the performance of female students in social studies in junior secondary school exams was below expectations. This is

in contrast to the recent campaign for girl child education and the government's efforts to ensure that all students achieve excellent results. The subsequent data, derived from the Ogoja education zones, pertains to the technical reports produced by the ministry of education regarding the overall academic achievement of JSS 3 pupils from 2019 to 2021. In the year 2019, a total of 3,204 individuals registered as candidates. In the subsequent year of 2020, the number of registered candidates decreased slightly to 3,102. Moving on to the year 2021, a total of 3,139 students registered specifically for the subject of Social Studies. Upon the release of the 2019 results, 48% of male students, totaling 1538 individuals, achieved a credit grade (ranging from A to C), whilst 52% of female students, totaling 1661 individuals, obtained a pass mark (E and D). In 2020, 63% of male students achieved a passing grade, totaling 1923 students, while 38% of female students, amounting to 1179 students, failed. According to the Cross River State Ministry of Education in 2021, 65% of male students, which is 2000 students, passed, whereas 35% of female candidates, which is 1,139 applicants, failed. However, the society is concerned due to the lack of government dedication to education development in the state. As a result, female students are discouraged, prompting the public to demand improved academic performance from them in the upcoming year.

During the early 1900s, there was concern among people over the adverse physical effects of providing education to girls, resulting in the exclusion of many girls from school (Nwagbara, 2019). Nevertheless, there is a strong demand for the education of girls. This is due to the growing recognition that achieving sustainable human development is not possible if a significant portion of the population, especially women, continue to be silenced, repressed, marginalised, and discriminated against (UNESCO, 2010). However, the enrollment rate for males is consistently higher than that of females at all times. For example, an analysis of the gender enrollment ratio of elementary school students in Cross River State during the 2021-2022 academic year reveals a steady prevalence of males, with an average ratio of 85%

and 75% respectively, according to the Federal Ministry of Education (2002). This study examines the relationship between classroom cultural diversity, gender bias, and students' academic achievement in Social Studies in Ogoja Local Government Area.

The issue of inadequate academic achievement among students in Social Studies and other relevant social scientific disciplines at the upper secondary level has been a persistent concern for the general public, particularly those involved in education. The academic performance of students in Social Studies is consistently poor, despite extensive efforts by the government to address the issue. These efforts have not resulted in the predicted improvement in education development or the high academic accomplishment of students.

Several problems, including ineffective teaching methods, a shortage of skilled teachers, a lack of instructional materials, insufficient financing, and a lack of acceptable practical equipment, are believed to be responsible for the negative trend, especially among female Social Studies students. The researcher attributes the low accomplishment of female students in Social Studies to the presence of diverse classes and a curriculum that exhibits gender prejudice. The impact of a curriculum that favours one gender over the other on students' academic achievement in the subject of Social Studies. Nigeria, like the majority of countries worldwide, is characterised by a patriarchal social structure. In a patriarchal society, women are typically perceived as mere "objects" primarily for the pleasure of males, with their significance limited to the roles of wife and mother inside the household.

Even in the 21st century, women continue to face various forms of discrimination, oppressive legislation, and societal attitudes that aim to maintain their subordinate, reliant, and marginalised status. In the late 20th century, there was a widespread recognition of gender issues that became a prominent focus in almost every civilization. Nwagbara (2019) defines gender as the set of socially created roles, attitudes, and expectations that are taught and linked with males and females. In

Nigeria, boys' sexuality is consistently validated and praised, in contrast to girls, who frequently encounter ambivalence, and at times, rejection and negation. According to Unimna, Odey, and Ekuri's (2019) study, the majority of respondents in Oju/Obi Local Government Area of Benue State, specifically 322 individuals (75%), agreed that a significant number of females in the area get married before they turn eighteen (18). On the other hand, 64 respondents (16%) disagreed with this statement. The researcher conducted a study on forced marriage, and the findings indicate that 236 respondents acknowledged that forced marriage is still being practised.

The male-defined curriculum is based on the notion that the male experience is universally applicable, reflective of mankind, and serves as a foundation for making generalisations about all individuals. The knowledge that is explored and taught, which is the essence of learning, is knowledge that is expressed by and pertains to males (James, 2008). The lack of awareness regarding the peculiarity of women's existence as a group necessitates a more comprehensive understanding of information. The feminine experience is overshadowed by the male experience.

In certain instances, female children attend school alongside their male brothers. In these cases, parents are required to sufficiently supply learning materials for the male children, while the girls are expected to make do with less resources. The consequence of this is frequently subpar academic achievement by female students, which typically leads to psychological and emotional distress. Many parents exhibit a bias towards prioritising the education of their male children over their female offspring, since they anticipate receiving greater assistance from boys as compared to girls.

Without exception, the female child is the one that is worst affected. She is occasionally perceived as an idle student. Female students are often perceived as lacking in logical reasoning abilities. Male students consistently receive a greater amount of teacher's attention compared to their female counterparts. Classrooms often experience a significant amount of stereotyping

and prejudices. Some teachers assign courses to students based on gender stereotypes. They believe that science courses are more suitable for male students because they perceive them as difficult and best suited for males. On the other hand, they view vocational subjects as more appropriate for female students.

Esiobu (2005) asserts that stereotyping has resulted in the underrepresentation of women in science-related fields, such as Engineering, Architecture, and medicine. Enrolling girls in school has proven to be a challenging endeavour for several evident reasons, as previously mentioned in the recent publication by the Cross River State Ministry of Education. Available statistics indicate that the number of female pupils enrolled in school (2120) is significantly lower compared to the number of male pupils (2490).

Cultural and religious variables contribute to the underperformance of females in Social Studies in the studied area. Within the school or classroom setting, there is gender segregation. Certain religions and cultures uphold the belief that there should be gender segregation in educational settings, advocating for the separation of females and boys in the classroom. This scenario may result in diminished performance within a particular group, particularly among females, as they are unable to benefit from the exchange of ideas, collaborative discussions, and group projects that could otherwise increase their skills. Child marriage is prevalent in the northern section of the country, leading to the withdrawal of young girls from school. This regional discrepancy contributes to a lower proportion of female students enrolled in schools compared to their counterparts in the southern region.

The impact of a gender-balanced curriculum on students' academic achievement in the subject of Social Studies. This phase builds upon the investigations initiated in the women's curriculum phase, focusing on the dynamics of the relationship between women and men and how they mutually enhance one other. Researchers, recognising the constraints of studying women in isolation and understanding that gender is a relational concept,

aim to identify the key locations where the experiences of women and men overlap (James, 2008).

In order for a curriculum to be gender inclusive or sensitive, it must address significant topics that are advantageous to both male and female students. A curriculum that favours one gender over the other is not well-received since it lacks gender awareness. To address the historical marginalisation and oppression of women, as well as their current educational disadvantages, it is crucial to enhance individualised instructional methods and participatory class activities in order to motivate and promote effective female participation. In order to provide a comprehensive education that addresses the challenges of a diverse and multicultural classroom, particularly in relation to gender differences, the government aims to incorporate the viewpoints and experiences of traditionally marginalised groups, including women from all backgrounds, as well as males and females who feel that their education does not cater to their needs. Curriculum developers should strive to achieve a balanced curriculum that equally benefits both males and females.

The primary concept that arises in women's scholarship, similar to their male counterparts, is the notion that the focus and importance should be placed on women's activities rather than men's. The substance of women's everyday lives, which was previously undervalued, should be given new importance as scholars explore topics such as women's virtual presence, household chores, childbirth, raising children, female sexuality, female friendships, and the study of the life cycle. The teacher-centered approach to teaching should be replaced by the learner-centered approach, which ensures that the interests of all types of learners are effectively addressed (Mkpa, 2009).

Objectives of the Study

This study examines the relationship between classroom diversity and students' academic performance in Social Studies in Ogoja Local government Area of Cross River State. The Study specifically sought to examine the:

- i. relationship between gender-biased curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies; and
- ii. relationship between gender-balanced curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies.

Hypothesis

In line with the research questions, the following hypotheses were stated to direct the study.

- i. There is no significant relationship between gender-biased curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies.
- ii. Gender-balanced curriculum does not significantly relate with students' academic performance in Social Studies.

Methods

The study employed a survey research design. The study population consisted of students enrolled in public secondary schools in the Ogoja Local Government Area, Cross River State, who were in the upper basic school level. The study employed the stratified random sampling technique for its sampling procedure. The technique was employed to select the schools and population, as the LGA consists of two axes. The study sample consisted of 230 pupils, selected from a total population of 10,156 upper basic students in the area. The data collection process involved the use of two instruments: a questionnaire labelled as Classroom Diversity Variable (CDV) and a Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT). The instrument underwent face validation, and its reliability was assessed using the Cronbach alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.69. Additionally, the Kuder Richardson formula – 20 was used to establish the reliability coefficient of 0.87 for the Social Studies achievement test. To test the hypotheses, the Pearson product moment correlation was employed at a significance level of 0.05. The researcher individually administered the instrument copies with the assistance of qualified research assistants. To facilitate data preparation, codes were assigned to each item and a coding schedule was created by

generating a key for each of the constructed instruments. The issue was evaluated using a four-point Likert scale, which included the options of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and severely disagree (SD).

Results

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between gender-biased curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies. Pearson product moment correlation was used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of relationship between gender-biased curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies(N = 230)

Variable	$\Sigma x \Sigma y$	$\Sigma X^2 \Sigma y^2$	Σxy	r-cal
Gender-biased curriculum (x)	2926	47584	43482	0.466*
Students' academic performance (y)	2599	41726		

*Significant at 0.05 level, df = 228, critical r = 0.138

The result of analysis presented in table 1 showed that the calculated r-valued of 0.466 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.138 at 0.05 level of significance with 228 degree of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a strong significant relationship between gender-biased curriculum are students' academic performance in Social Studies in public secondary school, junior students in Ogoja Local Government Area.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between gender balanced curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of relationship between gender-balanced curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies(N = 230)

Variable	$\Sigma x \Sigma y$	$\Sigma x^2 \Sigma y^2$	Σxy	r-cal
Gender-biased curriculum (x)	2732	44368	46394	0.194*
Students' academic performance (y)	2599	41726		

*Significant at .05 level, $df = 228$, critical $r = 0.138$

The result of analysis presented in table 2 showed that the calculated r-value of 0.194 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.138 at 0.05 level of significance with 228 degrees of freedom. This is an indication that the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between gender balanced curriculum and students' academic performance in Social Studies in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Discussions

The findings from hypothesis one indicate a notable correlation between a curriculum that is biased towards a specific gender and the academic performance of pupils at the upper basic level. The outcome aligns with Nwagbara's (2019) assertion that women in the 21st century continue to face various forms of marginalisation, oppression, and attitudes aimed at perpetually keeping them in subordinate, dependent, and marginalised positions. According to Nwagbara (2019), in Nigeria, the celebration and affirmation of boys' sexuality is more prevalent compared to girls, whose births are often met with mixed feelings and rejection. Regrettably, female education was not considered a priority. This study is additionally corroborated by Odey (2019), who said that young girls experience withdrawal from school and are compelled into early marriage, occasionally against their volition, while their male counterparts are afforded the opportunity to pursue further education. The report by Unimna, Odey, and Ekuri (2019) supports

the study's findings that early marriage, especially among girls, leads to the deprivation of their right to education and hinders their personal development in preparation for maturity.

Furthermore, the results of hypothesis one, which indicate that a curriculum that favours one gender is harmful to girls' education, align with the findings of Edem and Agusiobo (2018). They argue that in some cases, when both male and female children attend school, parents tend to prioritise providing sufficient learning materials for the male children, while the girls are expected to make do with limited resources. Consequently, this frequently leads to subpar academic achievement and limited success beyond the classroom. The results of this study align with James's (2008) perspective that a gender-inclusive or gender-sensitive curriculum should address crucial issues that benefit both male and female students. A curriculum that favours one gender over the other is not well-received because it lacks gender awareness. The World Bank (2010) welcomed this study's call for curriculum developers to strive for gender balance in the curriculum, benefiting both males and females. Promoting gender equality by ensuring that all students, regardless of their sex, are treated and valued equally, and provided with equitable chances to fully engage in classroom instruction and learning.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a high correlation between classroom diversity, gender bias, and students' academic performance in the subject of Social Studies. The existing research and analysis of this study clearly indicate that there is a correlation between gender prejudices, gender balanced curriculum, and students' academic achievement. Based on the collected data on the independent and dependent variables, it is evident that the absence of a multicultural or balanced curriculum in classrooms has a significant impact on the academic performance of learners, particularly female students.

Recommendations

Curriculum makers should receive education and awareness on gender issues and how they affect the education of girls and women. It is imperative for all local government councils in the state to establish bylaws with stringent regulations and principles that would prohibit parents from coercing their female offspring into marriage. It is imperative to have a guidance counsellor in schools who is attentive to gender issues in order to promote gender equality.

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