

INFLUENCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPE ON PUPILS' KNOWLEDGE OF SEX EDUCATION IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education in south-west, Nigeria. This study leveraged on a descriptive survey research design approach, and used a population of 382,017 primary five pupils from public schools in Oyo, Osun, and Ondo states. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select a total of 384 pupils. The instruments used for quantitative data collection included the Gender Stereotype Questionnaire (GSQ), the Pupils' Knowledge of Sex Education Assessment Test (PKSEAT), all of which were developed by the researcher. The reliability of the questionnaire and assessment test were done through a test re-test method and the results yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.91 and 0.79 respectively. The data collected to address the research question were evaluated using descriptive statistics of mean, percentage, and frequency count while the simple linear regression was used to analyze the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. Findings revealed that pupils expressed positive opinions about gender stereotype (mean=3.09). The pupils' knowledge of sex education was all found to be high (15.90). Gender stereotypes were also found to have a significant influence on knowledge of sex education ($B=0.138$; $t_{(382)} = 11.03$; $P=0.000$). It can be concluded that the influence of gender stereotype on knowledge of sex education among pupils in south-west, Nigeria was significant. It was therefore recommended that educational interventions should be designed to address existing gender stereotypes in order to sustain and further enhance pupils' knowledge of sex education.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Knowledge of Sex Education

Introduction

A host of things happening in this current dispensation are capable of promoting unhealthy sexual activities among children. The ubiquity of immoral and sexually explicit contents that are being featured in secular music, television, and online platforms has also acted as an addendum to this issue. The Nigerian education system is also feeling the impact as the level at which school pupils indulge in immoral sexual activities has become a cause for worry the public domain. Going by the findings that emanated from Nigerian Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS) in 2018, about 60% of children in middle basic school who has been engaging in sexual intercourse with their partners were not using protection. Likewise, data from NDHS comprising 45,793 women, aged 15–24 years, revealed an increase in pregnancy termination from 4.2% in 2013 to 4.9% in 2018. The implications of this matter cannot be overstated and all hands must be on deck to curtail this trend.

Thorough scrutiny of the situation things in Nigeria shows a lack of comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education-based curriculum (Agu, 2022). Unprecedented emphasis has been on children's academic knowledge especially in core subjects like Mathematics and English language (Yinkore & Mgbomo, 2022). While this is essential, however there is more to education than people just being taught how to read and write. As such, sex education ought to be a part of the curriculum if children are to be responsible and positively contribute to the society. Sex education is a specialized area of knowledge that focuses on all aspects of human sexuality (Enebechi, Iyoke, & Eze, 2023).

According to Bada and Adewumi (2019), children ought to be exposed key topics in sex education from childhood. Knowledge of sex education can give a child adequate understanding of biological, sociological and psychological

aspects of human sexual health (Adejuwon, 2023). The repercussions that ensue from a child sex education knowledge can however be colossal and can lead to quite a number of risky sexual behaviours like unwanted pregnancies, abortion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) just to mention a few. The child in question may not only experience dwindled educational trajectory but may also have to battle depression and even thoughts of suicide (Lyu, Shen, & Hesketh, 2020). These repercussions can be dire for the child in some cases and may also linger till adulthood. This is a call to action for relevant stakeholders to take swift steps toward salvaging the situation. Taking a swift step suggest a need for timely detection of potential contributing factors and interventions.

There are curious factors worthy of consideration when it comes to knowledge of sex education (Roy, Hossain, & Ghosh, 2022). Nevertheless, key among such factors that have been capturing the interest of researchers over the years is gender stereotype. This is because gender stereotype has become a cankerworm and have unconsciously eaten deep into every fabric of society including education. In accordance with the study of Shamilishvili (2019), gender stereotype is usually one-sided when it comes to the dynamics between a man and woman. It centers on the preconceived notions that members of the society have regarding binary gender classification. These can swing people to oversimplify their understanding of gender groups with wrong views. It can perpetuate harmful biases, limiting opportunities and hindering progress towards a more equitable society (Jin, 2023).

The educational sector has had its own fair share of gender stereotype. This is not farfetched as instructional textbooks represent a perfect depiction of a scenario where boys a portrayed as an engineer whereas girls as showcased as washing clothes or babysitting. This can paint a picture in the minds of the pupils reading these textbooks that one occupation is deemed appropriate for men and the other unworthy for the women. These preconceived notions of female images in textbooks can lead to the distortion of female self-image and make their roles constrained to limited fields and occupations (Rong, Xue, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021). It is not uncommon for educators to assign tasks that align with traditional gender roles, such as asking boys to cut the grass, while girls are tasked with sweeping the classrooms. These can inadvertently send the message that certain roles and aspirations are more suitable for one gender over the other, potentially limiting the range of possibilities a pupil might consider for themselves. This means that gender stereotype can confine an individual to behave in a way that society has deemed appropriate regardless of whether the behaviour is right or wrong (Bertrand, 2020). While the effect of all these may not always be immediately apparent, it can shape a pupil's development in profound ways.

It is also worth mentioning that different viewpoints have been raised as regards gender stereotype and sex education. Going by what was revealed in the study of Attieno (2022), the poor knowledge of sex education among children is a true reflection of the stereotypical expectations that the society placed on gender roles. An example if this is not farfetched in the society as girls from young age are made to realise that they must live a modest lifestyle and keep their virginity before marriage and as a result, they may feel hesitant to seek out or engage in discussions about sex education because of societal expectations. Different genders have different physiological structures and sexual maturity ages and this has led to differences in the content of sex education. As a result, boys have a larger amount of knowledge about spermatorrhea and masturbation, while girls have the most knowledge about menstruation and rape (Dong, Wang, Xiong, & Zhang, 2022).

Some researchers such as Eliot, Ahmed, Khan and Patel (2021) have a contrary opinion and believed that inasmuch as societal stereotype exist, they hardly dictate or limit a pupil's competencies in grasping essential subject matters, including human sexuality. They acknowledged that individuals, regardless of gender, have the brain capacity to acquire knowledge and understand any subject matter when provided with accurate and age-appropriate educational materials. Furthermore, Nigeria has a strict culture on human sexuality and the mere mention or discussion of matters related to sex education is sometimes tagged as taboo or contempt for societal norms and values (Tupper, 2014). Some Nigerians have strongly opposed sex education, especially in primary schools, because they believe it will be difficult for pupils to understand since they are too young. They are also afraid that it will in some way corrupt the minds of the pupils. Some people think that sexuality is an instinctive drive and that when children reach a particular age and sexual maturity, they will naturally gain information about sex (Chi, 2022). For example, they assume, that when girls

reach puberty, they will automatically learn about menstruation and female physiology. Furthermore, some people assume that a lack of understanding about sex among young children is a sign of moral purity. This viewpoint still prevails to this present day, with some Nigerians still considering sex to be filthy and vulgar.

All these arguments and counter arguments are testaments to the fact that the discourse between societal norms and sexuality of children are multifaceted and warrant further research (Spinner, Cameron, & Tenenbaum, 2023). This study therefore unravelled what could help or make it harder for children to understand their sexuality. Only through such an understanding can an environment be created that empowers pupils with the knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of their sexual education and challenge restrictive gender norms. Hence, it is against this background that the researcher deems it fit to investigate the influence of gender stereotype on the pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-West, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The extent at which pupils participate in sexual immoralities in this current dispensation has been a lingering topic of interest. Concerned stakeholders in this discourse have also put in considerable efforts to turn the tide but little to no avail. The health risks associated with such behaviours are wake-up call for all hands to be on deck to make certain that schoolchildren have an up-to-date knowledge of sex education. Researchers have also weighed in on this issue but the controversies and inconsistencies in results warrants the need for more probe into this issue. This study was therefore carried out to examine the influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-West, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The research questions outlined below were answered in this study:

1. What is the opinion of pupils' regarding gender stereotype?
2. What is the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education?

Research Hypothesis

The subsequent research hypotheses were verified on 0.05 alpha level:

H01: There is no significant influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-West, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study leveraged on a descriptive survey research approach. The population for this study was all 382,017 primary five pupils in public schools across Oyo, Osun, and Ondo states. A multistage sampling technique was adopted, starting with purposive sampling to select three states from the South-West, followed by proportionate sampling to select 24 Local Government Areas (5 from Ondo, 9 from Osun, and 10 from Oyo). Simple random sampling was then used to select four public primary schools from each local government, and four primary five pupils were randomly chosen from each school, making a total sample of 384 pupils.

The data collection process was facilitated by the use of Gender Stereotype Questionnaire (GSQ), and Pupils' Knowledge of Sex Education Assessment Test (PKSEAT), all of which were developed by the researcher, and face and content validated by the lecturers in the department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Kwara State University, Malete. These instruments underwent a reliability test through a test re-test method and Kuder-Richardson 20 (KR 20) and the results yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.91 and 0.79 respectively. The data collected to address the research question were evaluated using descriptive statistics of mean, percentage, and frequency count while the simple linear regression, a parametric statistical method, was used to analyze the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question One: What is the opinion of pupils’ regarding gender stereotype?

Table 4: Opinion of Pupils’ Regarding Gender Stereotype

| S/N | Items | Mean | Std. Deviation | Remarks |
|-----|---|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Boys are better at mathematics than girls. | 2.76 | 0.99 | Agreed |
| 2. | Girls are better at languages than boys. | 3.21 | 0.90 | Agreed |
| 3. | Boys are better at science than girls. | 2.85 | 0.99 | Agreed |
| 4. | Girls are better at art than boys. | 3.13 | 0.83 | Agreed |
| 5. | Girls are better at playing with dolls than boys. | 3.49 | 0.81 | Strongly Agreed |
| 6. | Girls can be good at cooking than boys. | 3.41 | 0.86 | Strongly Agreed |
| 7. | Boys are better at sports than girls. | 3.21 | 0.84 | Agreed |
| 8. | Girls are better at taking care of pets than boys. | 3.15 | 0.80 | Agreed |
| 9. | It is okay for boys to cry more than girls. | 2.70 | 1.06 | Agreed |
| 10. | Boys can play video games well better than girls. | 3.11 | 0.83 | Agreed |
| 11. | Girls can be amazing dancer better than boys. | 3.26 | 0.82 | Strongly Agreed |
| 12. | It is okay for boys to show emotions. | 2.90 | 0.96 | Agreed |
| 13. | Only girls should take care of the house. | 2.95 | 0.91 | Agreed |
| 14. | Only boys should take on leadership roles. | 2.98 | 0.95 | Agreed |
| 15. | Girls should often be seen as followers or supporters. | 2.75 | 0.98 | Agreed |
| 16. | Boys should be interested in playing with cars. | 2.96 | 0.94 | Agreed |
| 17. | Boys and girls can play together. | 3.23 | 0.68 | Agreed |
| 18. | Boys and girls should be treated equally. | 3.41 | 0.71 | Strongly Agreed |
| 19. | It is okay for boys to be stronger than girls. | 3.12 | 0.69 | Agreed |
| 20. | It is okay for boys and girls to do the same job when they grow up. | 3.22 | 0.72 | Agreed |
| | Weighted Average | 3.09 | | Agreed |

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Table 1 shows the opinion of pupils’ regarding gender stereotype. The table shows that pupils agreed that boys are better at mathematics than girls (mean =mean=2.76), girls are better at languages than boys (mean =mean =3.21), boys are better at science than girls (mean =mean =2.85), girls are better at art than boys (mean =mean =3.13), boys are better at sports than girls (mean =mean =3.21), girls are better at taking care of pets than boys (mean =mean =3.15), it is okay for boys to cry more than girls (mean =2.70), boys can play video games well better than girls (mean =3.11), it is okay for boys to show emotions (mean =2.90), only girls should take care of the house (mean =2.95), only boys should take on leadership roles (mean =2.98), girls should often be seen as a follower or supporters (mean =2.75), boys should be interested in playing with cars (mean =2.96), boys and girls can play together (mean =3.23), it is okay for boys to be stronger than girls (mean =3.12), it is okay for boys and girls to do the same job when they grow up (mean =3.22) while the pupils strongly agreed that girls are better at playing with dolls than boys (mean =3.49), girls can be good at cooking than boys (mean =3.41), girls can be an amazing dancer better than boys (mean =3.26), boys and girls should be treated equally (mean =3.41). The weighted average mean is 3.09 which signifies that the pupils have a positive opinion regarding gender stereotype items in Table 1.

Research Question 2: What is the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education?

Table 2: Table showing level of pupils' knowledge of sex education

| Dispersion | Score | n | Mean Score | Remark |
|------------|-------|-----|------------|--|
| Minimum | 4 | 384 | 15.90 | High Level of Pupils' Knowledge of Sex Education |
| Maximum | 20 | | | |

Key: 0.00 – 9.99 = Low

High: 10.00 – 20.00

Table 2 shows the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education. Apparently the minimum score was 4 while the maximum score was 20. Then the mean score was 15.90 which indicated that the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education was high.

H01: There is no significant influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-West, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis on Influence of Gender Stereotype on Pupils' Knowledge of Sex Education.

| Model | N | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | F-cal. | P-value |
|-------|-----|-------|----------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| 1 | 384 | 0.491 | 0.241 | 0.289 | 121.615 | 0.000 |

Dependent Variable: Knowledge of Sex Education

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 3 summarizes the regression results of the influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-west, Nigeria. The result indicated that there was a positive correlation between gender stereotype and pupils' knowledge of sex education ($R = 0.49$) while R-squared is 0.241 which means that the independent variable (gender stereotype) explained 24.1% variations of the dependent variable (pupils' knowledge of sex education). Thus, this is an accurate reflection that, gender stereotype has a significant relationship with pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-west, Nigeria ($F_{382} = 121.615$ $p = 0.000$).

Table 4 Test of Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficient | | Standardized Coefficient | T | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------|--------------------------|--------|------|-------------------------|----------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Low/Bound | Up/Bound |
| 1 (Constant) | 7.065 | .730 | | 9.676 | .000 | 5.629 | 8.500 |
| Gender Stereotype | .138 | .012 | .491 | 11.028 | .000 | .113 | .162 |

Dependent Variable: Knowledge of Sex Education

Source: Field Survey 2024

The test of significance results as presented in Table 4 shows that gender stereotype statistically significantly influenced pupils' Variable: pupils' knowledge of sex education in South-west, Nigeria ($B = .138$; $t_{(382)} = 11.028$, $P = 0.000$). It indicated that at a 5% level of significance there was enough evidence that the regression equation specified that, gender stereotype significantly influenced pupils' knowledge of sex education. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that gender stereotype has significant positive influence on pupils' knowledge of sex education.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that the opinion of pupils' regarding gender stereotype in South-West, Nigeria was positive. A possible reason could be due to modernization and the rise of social media where students are slowly learning new things about gender roles and behaviours. The finding of this study is in tandem with Ellemers (2018) who revealed that gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in society and still influence what people expect and how they act, even though social norms are gradually experiencing positive changes. This finding is also in line with Kray, Howland, Russell and Jackman (2017) who, in their study, reported that even though there are improvements in way gender equality is being embraced, many still hold onto old ideas about what roles and activities are right for boys and girls. The findings of these researchers point out how hard it is to break down gender stereotypes and this resistance likely comes from a wish to keep the social structure unchanged and not upset established norms.

The second finding of this study revealed that the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education was high. A logical reason for this finding could be attributed to Nigerian parents as most of them, nowadays, are not shy to discuss sex education topics with their children anymore. This finding is in tandem with the study of Ademuyiwa, Ayamolowo, Oshinyemi and Oyeku (2023) where it was revealed that school children reported good knowledge of sex education, with knowledge increasing with class level. This finding, however, negates Amosu, Ajike, Omoronyia and Olaoye (2022) who conducted a research on school girls and found a suboptimal level of sexual health knowledge among them. This finding also contradicts the study of Oyewusi, Sabo and Emeloye (2022) where it was revealed that the level of pupils' knowledge of sex education in Nigeria is low, with adolescents lacking awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and reproductive health care facilities.

The third finding of this study revealed that there was a significant influence of gender stereotype on pupils' knowledge of sex education. A reason for this finding could be down to what the expectations the society have placed on male and female. This might have affected their ideology on what is considered acceptable or appropriate for boys and girls to know, learn and do. This finding is in line with the study of Giniotaitè (2020) where it was revealed that gender stereotypes significantly impact pupils' knowledge of sex education by shaping their understanding of sexuality and roles. Li et al. (2022) also mentioned in their study that gender stereotype is a germane factor that affects knowledge and attitudes towards sex education. This finding, however, contradicts that of Alcock (2024) whose study did not find a significant influence of gender stereotypes on young children's understanding of sex.

Conclusion

This research examined the influence of gender stereotype on knowledge of sex education among pupils in south-west, Nigeria. Based on the study, it can be established that pupils in south-west, Nigeria showed a positive and progressive opinion on gender stereotypes. It can also be established from the findings that pupils in south-west, Nigeria demonstrated a high level of knowledge of sex education, and gender stereotypes have significant influence on this knowledge.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following succinct recommendations are made:

1. While progress had been made regarding gender stereotypes, further efforts especially from parents and teachers are required to continue to change old beliefs and shape pupils' opinions on traditional gender roles in South-West, Nigeria.
2. Teachers should endeavour to continuously implement instructional strategies that can help reduce gender stereotypes in classroom activities.
3. To achieve long-lasting change, parents should create time and engage their children in discussions surrounding gender stereotypes and sex education.

4. There is also need for stronger policies within educational institutions that lay emphasis on zero tolerance for gender-based discrimination and stereotyping in both curricular and extracurricular activities.
5. Government and school owners should orientate teachers on the dire need to address gender stereotypes that affects pupils' knowledge of sex education
6. Government and school owners should try to come up with initiatives that can help sustain the knowledge of sex education among pupils in South-West, Nigeria.

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