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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE ROLES OF WOMEN

By

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ABSTRACT

More often than not, the socialization experiences of females are geared towards their future roles as mothers and homemakers (Russo, 1976). This, it is believed, has some psychological constraints on females, which invariably affect every area of the female life, including academic achievement. With the changing times, however, more females are moving out of the kitchen and other forms of 'traditional' confinement. It follows therefore that a female who is "non-traditional" in her role orientation may not be plagued by fear of success and may therefore be able to perform well in school. It was therefore the purpose of this study to find out if there is any difference in the academic performance of female students having a "traditional" perception of the roles of women vis-a-vis those having a "non-traditional" perception. The results of the study showed that female students having a "non-traditional" perception of the roles of women perform better than their counterparts having a traditional perception of the roles of women.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, few Nigerian women did other things apart from the socially approved or recognized roles of wives, mothers and home makers. Many girls were not given the opportunity to attend western - oriented schools because education was considered as being irrelevant to the roles they would play in their adult lives. Gender role stereotypes are a major factor in the socialization process of children across cultures.

According to Hoffman (1977), the socialization experiences of girls across cultures are geared towards motherhood. Russo (1976) asserted that the females' type of socialization inflicts psychological constraints on them during womanhood. Rogers (1980) believes that the socialization processes turn many women into advocates of the home and family "destiny". Further, Rogers asserts that women have been carefully trained for such types of work, and are repeatedly told that it represents the best that life can offer them. If Rogers' claim is accepted, then it is understood why women would not work on anything else, except to plan their lives to suit their future roles as wives and mothers. This psychological conditioning is strong to the extent that it affects females' everyday life and interactions (Jongeward and Scott, 1976).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rheingold and Cook (1975), among others, have asserted that girls are more likely to be given playthings of the mother's role, while boys are more likely to be given toys that represent the working world of men and their domestic superiority and roles. Thus, Rosenfeld (1975) observed that boys excel in those skills in which they excel because of the advantages of masculine toys they have been used to while girls excel in verbal activities as a result of the interaction they have with their mothers during domestic work and more particularly during shopping errands. Komarowsky (1946) reported the case of an intelligent girl who was told by her mother that "'A' in philosophy is very nice dear, but please don't become so deep that no man will be good enough for you." On the other hand, O'Leary (1976) asserted that socialization experiences such as the advice given by the mother in the above story makes most teenage girls desist from getting excellent grades and unquestionable A's. Kohlberg (1966) believes that the acceptance of stereotypes such as the notion that females are weak and incompetent bring about a lower expectation for females success in various tasks.

In a study reported by Doherty and Culver (1976), it was revealed that there was no significant relationship between the subjects' perception of females' sex role identification and class rank. However, the investigations reported a significant positive correlation between verbal ability and sex-role expectations of the girls in the study sample. The sample in the study consisted of 165 female students. The investigators used a 5-point scale inventory called "Feminine Sex Role Value" to measure the subjects' sex role identification. The inventory contained 34 statements of which one-half of the statements dealt with non-traditional feminine sex - role expectations and the remaining half of the items dealt with traditional values attached to female sex role expectations. The results of the above study might be true for the American sample. A similar or different result might be expected in a Nigerian-based study, like this one.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

It is therefore the purpose of this study to find out the difference (if any) in the academic performance of the girls categorised as having 'traditional' perception of the roles of women, vis-a-vis those categorised as having a 'non-traditional' perception of the roles of women.

The results of this study may show that the education of girls has an influence on their role perception and that this might influence them academically.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question of the study is: Do female students with 'traditional' perception of the role of women and female students with 'non-traditional' perception of the roles of women differ in academic performance?

Sample:- A stratified random sampling technique was used in this study. There are fourteen Local Government Areas in Kwara State, six of which are designated educationally less developed. There was a sample of local government areas designated as educationally advantaged and the local government areas designated as educationally disadvantaged. Next from the sample of local government areas was the sample of towns and from the sample of towns was the sample of schools. From the sample of schools was the sample of female students for the study randomly selected as follows: Sixty nine girls from five schools in rural settings and ninety-seven from three schools in urban settings. Towns that were considered urban in urban setting were selected from local governments areas designated by the state government as educationally developed. Towns that were considered rural in setting were also selected from the local government areas designated as educationally less developed. Towns considered as urban in setting were considered as such because most of the people living there engage in non-agricultural ventures and there are more facilities like educational institutions, industries and companies there as compared to towns which were considered as rural in setting.

Instruments:

An investigator - designed instrument, a questionnaire, was used for the purpose of data collection on secondary school girls perception of the roles of women. The instrument was used to categorize the girls in the study as having a 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' perception of the roles of women. There were twenty-five items on a 5-point scale. The female students' academic grades during a promotion examination into SSS 3 at the Senior Secondary School Level and their first term examination scores in SSS 3 in English Language and Mathematics were collected and used in the investigation. This was for the purpose of identifying the students level of academic performance. The questionnaire used in the study was pilot-tested for its useability and reliability. A test-retest method was used to determine the reliability coefficient and which was 0.78. This was considered reliable enough for operational purpose. The investigator personally administered and collected the questionnaires.

RESULTS

The response of the students on the questionnaire were scored and the scores obtained were used to assign them into either having the 'traditional' perception of the roles of women or the 'non-traditional' perception of the roles of women.

The raw scores in English Language and Mathematics for the students were converted into a standard scores (and combined) for the purpose of analysis. An insignificant number of them did not respond to the questionnaire because their school scores were not immediately available. The questionnaires returned by such students were not used.

- (a) A t-test was performed on the mean scores of the male students in English Language and Mathematics ($N = 135$), i.e. those who were categorised as having traditional perception of the roles of women and the mean score for female students ($N = 27$) categorised as having a non-traditional perception of the roles of women. Females with 'traditional' perception of the roles of women had a mean score of 94.1 with an S.D. of 22.0, while their counterparts with a 'non-traditional' perception had a mean score of 104.6, with an S.D. of 20.2. The observed t-value was 2.28, $P < 0.05$, which is statistically significant. Thus, there was a significant difference in the academic performance of the subjects in favour of those who held a non-traditional perception. The hypothesis is not rejected. This finding is similar to the findings of researchers such as Fitzpatrick (1978) who noted that women with a non-traditional orientation towards female roles perform better than their counterparts who clung to traditional orientations. This finding is not surprising, since females with non-traditional perception of the roles of females may not be plagued by the fear of success', a state which has been proved to inhibit performance (Horner, 1972).
- (b) The investigator carried out a sort of data snooping by looking at the female students' performance in English. The t-test performed on the mean scores in English Language for the girls in the two groups under study yielded a t-value of 1.62, $P > 0.05$, which is not statistically significant. Female students with non-traditional perception had a mean score of 51.4 with an S.D. of 10.1 as compared to their counterparts who had a mean score of 47.5 and an S.D. of 11.6.
- (c) In Mathematics, t-test was performed on the mean scores for female students with traditional perception of the roles of women and those with non-traditional perception of the roles of women. The observed t-value was $t(160) = -2.23$, $P < 0.05$, which is statistically significant.

Female students with non-traditional perception of the roles of women had a higher mean score of 53.2,

Female students with non-traditional perception of the roles of women had a higher mean with an S.D. of 14.1, as compared to their counterparts with traditional perception who had a mean score of 46.7, and an S.D. of 13.9. Thus, there is a significant differences in the performance of the subjects in the two groups.

DISCUSSION

As the study revealed, female students with non-traditional perception of the roles of women perform better than their counterparts who had a traditional perception of the roles of women. This could be as a result of the fact that they may not be plagued by 'fear of success', a state that Horner (1972) has proved to inhibit performance. The difference in performance in English language for the two groups which was found not to be statistically significant could be because the subject is regarded as 'feminine'. even though students with non-traditional perception of the roles of women still had a better performance.

It is not surprising that female students with non-traditional perception of the roles of women performed better than those who had a traditional perception of roles of women in Mathematics since as Kirschner (1982) remarked, Mathematics is regarded as a masculine subject, and researchers such as Cramer (1974) have proved that boys perform better in the subject than girls because of this. It follows that girls who have a non-traditional perception of the roles of women and who may not perceive Mathematics as being a masculine subject may not only take a liking to it but strive to perform well in the subject.

The finding of this study is similar to that of Fitzpatrick (1978) and O'Leary (1976) who observed that women with non-traditional orientation towards female roles had better performance than those who clung to the traditional orientation towards female roles.

From the findings of this study, it becomes necessary for school psychologists and counsellors to counsel their female students without gender bias. They need to stress the fact that females embracing achievement and success, especially in the so-called masculine fields, is not wrong. This becomes necessary so that female students can strive as high as their male counterparts academically.

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