
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE VOCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

Research concerning the educational and vocational aspirations of boys has been much more comprehensive than for girls. Many studies find that there are differences between the aspirations and expectations of boys and girls. The descriptive survey method of research was utilized in this study. Data were collected with the use of questionnaires. Data selected girls (N =150) and boys (N =150) in Senior Secondary School or High School classes 1-3 (SS1, SS2 and SS3) drawn from twenty secondary schools by way of stratified random sampling using *Easy Sample Software version 5* and Vocational Interest Inventory (VII). The subjects were surveyed to ascertain their educational and vocational expectations. The cumulative analysis showed marginal significant variation in the educational and vocational aspirations of boys and girls. However, there are no significant differences between the vocational aspirations of boys and girls in SS1-SS3. When all the various classes were tested together, gender was shown to greatly influence the vocational aspirations of the High School students. The policy implication of the study is to build a theoretical model to guide the understanding and study of professional, educational and occupational aspirations of young people and to guide policy makers on the value of gender and social class in the planning of educational career provisions

Keywords: Gender differences, vocational aspiration, High School students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Current thoughts regarding the issues of gender and students' vocational and professional choices have occupied the centre of intellectual inquest. Among the related issues is children preparation for future employment opportunities, careers, contextual and structural barriers. There are some variables that influence students' vocational and professional aspirations including family obligations. In general, the variables that are consistently being assessed are personality, environment, goals, and interests involved in career choices and how vocational aspirations between genders differ.

One of the most often researched areas related to gender in education is the issue of gender differences that is comparing male and female characteristics and performance. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) attempted to summarize the arguments and findings in their book

which reviewed 1400 research studies on sex differences; they found that different aspects of performance are influenced by gender. Every society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender (Hesse-Biber & Carger, 2010). Gender is the division of people into two categories- men and women based on their biological differences. Through interactions with caretakers, socialization in childhood, peer pressure in adolescence, gendered work and family roles, men and women are socially constructed to be different in behaviour, attitude and emotions. The gendered social order is based on and maintains these differences (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2009).

A vocation is an individual's occupation; what they do for a living. An aspiration is the desire to do something great, make a mark therefore Janny (2011) asserted that vocational aspiration is the great desire to do something for a living. Role expectations of males and females differ so also their vocational aspirations. Gender inequality has been a long standing issue with which society continues to grapple; as soon as one is born, people start limiting one's possibilities based on that child's gender irrespective of the talents or potentials displayed. Achieving gender equality is an uphill task but a worthwhile one, no one should be underestimated based on their gender or denied opportunities simply because one is not of a particular gender. The challenge is how to identify and change institutional cultures so as to create a level playing ground for equal opportunities for males and females, it is against this backdrop that the researchers sought to investigate gender differences in the vocational aspiration of High School students in Port Harcourt. The research question is: Is there any difference in the vocational aspirations of Senior Secondary (SS) 1-3 students in selected High schools in Port Harcourt?

1.1 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

For purposes of this study the following null hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study:

- There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS 1.
- There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS 2.
- There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS 3.
- Gender does not significantly influence the vocational aspirations of SS 1-SS 3 students taken together

2. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is a range of characteristics used to distinguish between males and females particularly in the case of men and women and the masculine and feminine attributes assigned to them. Depending on the context, the discriminating characteristics vary from sex to social role (Klein, 2009). Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) attempted to summarize the general arguments and findings in their book, they concluded that whilst some patterns for example, female superiority in verbal skills and male superiority in mathematics skills, it is difficult to untangle the influence of stereotyping on individual perceptions of behaviours events and objects and also to separate out, if and to what extent, innate or learned behaviours underpin the development of behavioural or cognitive sex differences. Gipps and Murphy (1994) noted also that the range of differences is small compared to similarities existing between the sexes. William (2000) likewise suggests that sex differences in cognition is small and have narrowed further in some subjects areas in recent years. The most important finding is that sex differences in achievement

are small and has been steadily declining over that last 20 years. Very few tests show a standard mean difference in favour of either males or females of more than 0.4 which means that less than 4% of the variation in individual test scores is related to sex differences (William, 2000).

Role expectations of males and females differ. There are gender differences in mode of socialization, attitudes, interest; social expectations, stereotypes and vocational aspirations (Onyejiaku, 1991). Girls have been found typically to explore careers from a narrower mindset. Gottfredson (2000) demonstrated how this occurs based on vocational gender role socialization. Girls and boys learn early which vocation is suitable for them and which ones are not. Generally, girls are interested in literacy, clerical, artistic, musical and social activities while boys indicated preference for outdoor, mechanical, computational, business and industrial professions. Studies examining influences on adolescent career aspirations yielded contradictory results. The surveys included the Attitude towards Women Scale, the Career Aspiration Scale and questionnaires designed to measure gender traditionalism of future career choices, traditional gender stereotyping beliefs were predicted to correlate positively with the gender traditionalism of job choice. The masculine gender role was predicted to have more career aspiration than feminine gender role subjects (Hensley, 2010). Many career decisions such as whether to attend university or a trade school or the work force immediately after secondary school is made during adolescence.

Wulff and Steitz (2003) reported that female students with higher masculinity scores were more likely to prefer male dominated occupations. They found that secondary school girls aspire to work in the traditional female field were more androgynous than girls who aspired to mathematical field which is male dominated. They explained that the lack of congruence across these studies is that the traditional female field student were more committed to having a career than the male dominated field students who were not on a specific career track. Fassinger (1993) found that girls who were high in androgynous characteristics place more value on their career pursuit in addition to findings connecting androgyny to non-traditional occupation. Chusmir (2000) found that men who choose a traditionally feminine career were found to score lower on the masculine portion of The Ben Sex Role Indicator (BSRI) than those who chose traditional careers. Feather and Said (2006) found that there was no significant influence of males' gender roles on career aspiration specifically applying to stereotypes regarding male toughness, anti-feminists and homophobia. Grotevant, Cooper and Werrbach (2000) found that male adolescents as a whole group exhibited significantly higher levels of conformity to traditional gender stereotypes than female adolescents.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The survey design was utilized in the study. The population of the study consisted of all students in Public Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt; the figure is given as 76876 students enrolled at the end of 2010/2011. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure equal representation of the different classes and subjects and sample of 300 students was drawn to participate in the study. The instrument for data collection is the standardized test developed by Professor Bakare (1977) - Vocational Interest Inventory (VII). The test is a self-rating scale consisting of two sections; the first section requires the respondent to complete some personal information while the second section requires the individual to tick the vocational activity he prefers. Permission to carry out the exercise in each selected school was gotten from relevant authorities; the students who opted to participate were assured of the confidentiality of their response. The instrument was explained to them, they were given opportunity to ask questions and then they were allowed to fill the instrument. Teachers in the various schools assisted in handling out the instruments to the students and also for the collection. There was nearly a hundred percent retrieval of the instruments, respondents who filled their incorrectly were

allowed to collect fresh instruments and properly fill them. Data collated was analyzed using mean, simple percentages and t-test.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: Is there any difference in the vocational aspirations of SS1-3 students?

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and percentages of vocational aspirations

VOCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS	N	MEAN	STD	%
Literary	30	60.7	3.2	12.60
Persuasive	29	55.6	2.9	11.54
Social service	39	52.3	2.7	10.86
Outdoor	36	49.6	2.8	10.29
Artistic	30	49.6	2.8	10.29
Scientific	48	48.9	2.7	10.15
Computational	27	46.5	2.8	09.65
Mechanical	32	44.5	2.5	09.24
Clerical	22	38.8	2.3	08.05
Musical	12	35.3	2.1	07.33

The table above shows that there is a difference in the vocational aspirations of SS1-3 students.

Hypothesis I: There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS1.

Table 2: T-test analysis of the response of male and female students in SS1

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of significance
Male	50	86.3	2.1	98	0.4	2.000	0.05
Female	50	84.6	1.9				

The calculated t-value (0.4) is less than the critical t-value (2.000) at df=98 and at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted thus it implies that there is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS1

Hypothesis II: There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS2.

Table 3: T-test analysis of the response of male and female students in SS2

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of significance
Male	50	83.7	1.9	98	0.54	2.000	0.05
Female	50	83.5	1.83				

The calculated t-value (0.54) is less than the critical t-value (2.000) at df=98 and at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted thus it implies that there is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS2.

Hypothesis III: There is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS3.

Table 4: T-test analysis of the response of male and female students in SS3

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of significance
Male	50	67.8	1.7	98	0.30	2.000	0.05
Female	50	53.4	1.3				

The calculated t-value (0.30) is less than the critical t-value (2.000) at df=98 and at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted thus it implies that there is no significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS3.

Hypothesis IV: Gender does not significantly influence the vocational aspirations of SS1 –SS3 students taken together.

Table 5: Gender influence on the vocational aspirations of students

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of significance
Male	50	79.3	0.73	298	68.8	1.960	0.05
Female	50	73.8	0.70				

The calculated t-value (68.8) is greater than the critical t-value (1.960) at df=298 and at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected thus it implies that gender significantly influences the vocational aspirations of SS1- SS3 students taken together. Hypotheses One to Three sought to ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the vocational aspirations of male and female students in SS1-3, analysis of data showed that there was no difference. These findings are not in agreement with Onyejiaku (1991) that role expectations of male and female differs. However, there have been concerted efforts on the part of educators, counsellors and the media to reduce vocational gender role stereotypes (Klein, 2009) while the finding is in agreement with Wulff and Steitz (2003) study which showed that female students with higher masculinity score were more likely to prefer male dominated. Feather and Said (2000) found no significant influence of male’s gender roles on career aspiration specifically applying to stereotypes. Hypothesis Four sought to ascertain whether gender does significantly influence the vocational aspirations of SS1 –SS3 students taken together, the findings show that gender does significantly influence the vocational aspiration of students.

5. CONCLUSION

Johnson (2000 cited in Watson and McMahon 2005) found that senior elementary school children demonstrated a limited understanding of how their school academic activities related to the future world of work. There was also little understanding as to how their favourite school subject was relevant to their occupational aspiration. Based on the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the vocational aspiration of male and female students in SS1, SS2, SS3 rather gender was shown to significantly influence the vocational aspirations of the students when all the classes are taken together.

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