
Status of Teachers on Gender-Sensitive Instructional Materials at the Basic Education Level

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Abstract: *The study examined the status of teachers on gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level in Aguata Education Zone of Anambra State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 249 teachers was selected from the population of teachers in the lower and middle basic schools in the Zone. Four specific objectives guided the study. A researcher-made questionnaire titled Teachers' Status on Gender-Sensitive Instructional Materials Survey (TESOGIMS) was used to elicit information from respondents on their understanding, attitude and utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials as well as constraints to the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials. Data obtained were analysed using the mean (X). Results showed that teachers understand the concept of gender-sensitive instructional material, but, have mixed attitude to the use of gender-sensitive instructional materials and utilize gender-sensitive instructional materials to a low extent at the basic education level. The study recommended, among others, that teachers should be assisted to acquire skills and the right attitude for the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials.*

Key terms: *Instructional materials, Gender-sensitivity, Basic education*

Introduction

Instructional materials go by various names: teaching materials, teaching aids, educational media, and so on. 'Instructional material' is a generic term used to describe the resources teachers use in instructional delivery. It refers to any material (whether acquired or locally produced) with instructional content or function that is used for formal or informal teaching purposes. Instructional materials may include, but are not limited to, print and non-print materials; audio, visual, electronic, and digital hardware/software resources (Akpan & Okoli, 2017). Instructional materials come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have in common the capacity to facilitate learning. They support pupils learning and enhance their academic success. Ideally, instructional materials will be tailored to the content in which they are being used, to the context (which includes learner consideration) and the teacher who employs them.

A lot has been said about the efficacy of the use of instructional materials in teaching. Adeoye and Popoola (2011) contend that for learning to take place, teachers must have access to

necessary instructional materials and resources. They have to allow instructional materials to mediate between the content and the learners; and interact with tangible and intangible resources to ensure some appreciable levels of learner performance. It is an understanding gained from education psychology that while abstract thinking is a mark of the mature learner, children understand faster and acquire necessary skills and values when there is something concrete they could hold on to. Learners generally, and children in particular, therefore, learn better with concrete materials.

Instructional materials in use in various schools, unfortunately, tend to reinforce gender stereotype and bias by communicating differentiated gender roles. This practice undermines gender equity which is already in the front burner of academic discourse the world over. According to Prince Edward Island Department of Education (2008), instructional materials should reflect sensitivity to gender. Gender sensitivity is 'an understanding and routine consideration of the social, cultural and economic factors underlying discrimination based on sex' (African Union Gender Policy, 2007:29). It is the ability to recognize gender issues; the beginning of gender awareness (Mlama, Dioum, Makoye, Murage, Wagah & Washika, 2005). Gender sensitivity in the acquisition of instructional materials is borne out of the following understanding:

- Female and male students may have different methods of learning and different educational needs. In a gender-equitable education system, all methods of learning are respected equally, and students with gender-specific needs or characteristics are supported and provided with resources appropriately and equally.
- Language influences the way in which people understand and interpret the world around them; therefore, the language of recommended learning resources should be inclusive, but not necessarily neutral, and should promote equality for males and females.
- Students are influenced by attitudes and values around them. It is important that recommended learning resources reflect balanced images and information about males and females and support broad choices and many roles for both sexes. Some materials contain an inherent gender bias because of historical or cultural context. When such resources are used, students should be made aware of the context. (African Union Gender Policy, 2007:29).

To be gender sensitive therefore, is to rethink the socially established gender stereotypes and seek to level out this practice through some deliberate courses of action. Gender sensitivity in the utilization of instructional materials entails recognizing the need for instructional materials that promote gender equity and inclusion rather than stereotype in teaching and learning. According to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (undated), one of the challenges to an inclusive education stems from stereotypes at school (curricula, textbooks), school curricula in conflict with traditional culture and orientation of girls/women to non-scientific fields, among others. Textbooks still in use in schools, for instance, carry vestiges of biases. Instructional materials encourage boys and girls to think differently and to conform to the regimented established norms. The result is that certain occupational choices are understood by young minds as being exclusively reserved. Against the backdrop of this, it becomes imperative that teachers employ instructional materials that are inclusive and gender-sensitive rather than those ones that reinforce gender stereotypes characteristic of most traditional resources.

Since the use of instructional materials is the business of teachers, it is important that teachers reflect on the need for gender-sensitive instructional materials if the goal of gender

equity in education is to be achieved. Teachers are a key resource for effecting gender equality in education and the knowledge and attitudes of teachers are important for building and sustaining ideas and institutions oriented to gender equality (Unterhalter, Ezegwu, Shercliff, Heslop & North, 2015).

But, the question is: what is the status of teachers in this regard? In consideration of this, teachers' understanding, attitude and utilization come readily to mind. Understanding is a cognitive function of the individual that enables him/her to make meaning out of, and interpret phenomena. The teacher should be able to understand the import of gender-sensitivity in the choice of instructional materials before he/she could utilize same. Positive attitude, moreover, has immense part to play in this regard. Koballa and Glynn (2007) in Sharpe (2012) defined attitude as a general expression of either positive or negative feelings towards something. It is an expression of favour or disfavour toward a person, place, thing, or event usually called an attitude object. This feeling or expression directs individual's predisposition to perform an action. A teacher who has positive attitude to gender-sensitive instructional materials, more likely, will utilize same than the teacher who has a negative attitude. To utilize is to put to practical use, to practice. Determining teachers' understanding of, attitude to and utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials therefore, provide a good picture of teachers' status in this area.

Unfortunately, studies that investigated teachers' understanding, attitude and utilization of gender-sensitive pedagogy generally, and instructional materials particularly are rarely found, suggesting that this is a virgin land that craves imminent exploration. In an analysis of textbooks from different countries in sub Saharan Africa however, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 2006) observed that there are distinct gender stereotypes. According to FAWE, in many science textbooks, most illustrations mainly portray males only and it is usually the boys who are depicted in pictures as carrying out experiments. In most English language text and literature books, the pronoun "he" is conspicuous and most names refer to boys and men. In history textbooks, it is only heroes who are mentioned in liberation struggles, yet it is known that there were also heroines. In civics, whenever there is reference to top leadership the pronoun "he" is predominantly used.

The consequences of this kind of situation are obvious. A comparison of enrolment and graduate output in vocational courses revealed that females ranked very low in courses like Wood Work, Metal Work and Electrical/electronics, and high in Home Economics and Secretarial Studies (Arubayi, 2009). Inversely, males ranked high in those areas (Wood Work, Metal Work and Electrical/electronic) where the females are found wanting, and low in those areas (Home Economics and Secretarial Studies) where the females dominate. This pattern of choice conforms to the a priori expectation: programmes of study wear the colour of gender. Whereas it is at the foundation level of education that the foundation of this mind-set is laid; it is also at that level that remediation should commence.

Statement of the Problem

Ensuring that boys and girls alike, are learning- and succeeding- at equal levels around the world has occupied the attention of educators, policy makers, international agencies and national governments. One area of paramount interest is to remove all vestiges of gender bias and enthrone gender inclusiveness at all levels. This is particularly important at the basic education level when children are still in their formative age. It has been observed, however, that the conventional instructional materials still in use at this level of education in Nigeria foster

gender bias rather than eradicate it. Textbooks, illustrations and other material resources employed by teachers in teaching these young minds appear to undermine the effort at promoting gender-sensitive pedagogy. Since teachers are responsible for the implementation of the much cherished gender-sensitive pedagogy, the success or failure of the gender policy in this regard rests with them. The study therefore, sought to investigate teachers' understanding, attitude and utilization of gender sensitive instructional materials in the basic education system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the status of teachers on gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Find out teachers' level of understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level;
2. Determine teachers' attitude to gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level;
3. Determine teachers' extent of utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level;
4. Identify constraints to teachers' utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 1257 teachers in 157 state-owned primary (lower and middle basic) schools in Aguata Education Zone, Anambra State. The sample size for the study was 249 teachers, determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size from a given population. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select three schools from each of the three local government areas in the zone, namely, Aguata, Orumba South and Orumba South. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed structured questionnaire titled *Teachers' Status on Gender-Sensitive Instructional Materials Survey* (TESOGIMS). The TESOGIMS is a 20-item questionnaire arranged in four clusters to elicit information from teachers on the four areas of research interest. There are four options for responses, and respondents were expected to check the option that best represents their opinion about each statement. The mean ranges of the scale are given as follows:

Very High Extent or Strongly Agree:	3.00-4.00
High Extent or Agree:	2.50-2.99
Low Extent or Disagree:	1.50-2.49
Very Low Extent or Strongly Disagree:	0-1.49

TESOGIMS was validated by three experts; reliability of test instrument estimated with Cronbach Alpha yielded an overall index of 0.87. Researchers administered the instrument by hand delivery method, and completed copies of TESOGIMS numbering 227 (91.16 per cent recovery; 8.84 per cent mortality) were collated for analysis. Data were analysed using the mean.

Results

Objective one: Teacher understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials

Table 1: **Mean Ratings on Teachers' understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials (N=227)**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Instructional material in which portrayal of the sexes is balanced	84	66	45	32	2.89	Strongly Agreed
2	Instructional material which portrays diverse roles and relationships.	76	77	32	42	2.82	Strongly Agreed
3	Instructional material which uses appropriate tone and language.	32	33	99	63	2.15	Disagreed
4	Instructional material which avoids gender stereotyping and roles	201	11	3	12	3.77	Strongly Agreed
5	Instructional material which provides diverse perspectives.	87	55	19	66	2.72	Agreed
Cluster Mean						2.87	Agreed

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on teachers' understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials. Four of the items were rated from 2.72 to 3.77 which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. Item 3 was rated 2.15 which is below the criterion mean. The cluster mean of 2.82 however indicates that teachers have appreciable level of understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials.

Objective two: Attitude of teachers to gender-sensitive instructional Materials

Table 2: Mean Ratings on Teachers' attitude to Gender Sensitive Instructional Materials (N=227)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	I consider pupils' gender in my choice of instructional material.	31	18	87	91	1.95	Disagreed
2	I see nothing wrong in the current gender-blind instructional materials in use.	102	67	32	26	1.58	Disagreed *
3	I feel that school curricula should not be in conflict with male-dominated traditional culture.	43	29	88	67	2.79	Agreed *
4	I believe that analysing gender-compliant instructional materials is a waste of time.	119	66	14	28	1.78	Disagreed *
5	I believe that pupils will benefit more from gender-balanced instructional materials.	48	132	23	24	2.90	Agreed
Cluster Mean						2.20	Disagreed

***: Items 2, 3 and 4 (asterisked) are reverse scored**

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of respondents on attitude of teachers to gender-sensitive instructional materials. Items 3 and 5 were rated 2.79 and 2.90 respectively. The ratings were above the criterion mean of 2.50. The other three items were rated below the criterion mean. Their ratings ranged from 1.58 to 1.95. The cluster mean of 2.20, however indicates that teachers have negative attitude to gender-sensitive instructional materials.

Objective three: Extent of utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Extent of Utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials (N=227)

S/N	Items	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Textbooks that reflect gender balance.	21	25	87	94	1.88	Low Extent
2	Use of materials that portray female and male characters in equal numbers and involved in similar activities.	11	32	65	119	1.71	Low Extent
3	Conducting review of existing materials that are lopsided.	9	54	78	86	1.94	Low Extent
4	Assisting pupils to challenge stereotypes in the portrayal of female and male characters in the teaching/learning materials.	33	43	65	86	2.10	Low Extent
5	Use of gender responsive illustrations, which should be displayed on classroom walls to give a gender responsive classroom environment.	76	59	32	60	2.67	High Extent
Cluster Mean						2.06	Low Extent

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent of utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials by teachers. Item 5 indicates a mean rating of 2.67 which is high extent. Items 1 to 4, however were rated from 1.71 to 2.10 which indicate low extent. The cluster mean of 2.06 shows that gender-sensitive instructional materials were utilized to a low extent.

Objective four: Constraints to the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials

Table 4: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Constraints to the Utilization of Instructional Materials (N=227)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Scarcity of textbooks that depict gender balance.	98	85	12	32	3.10	Strongly Agreed
2	Difficulty in reviewing available instructional materials for gender responsiveness.	92	35	46	54	2.73	Agreed
3	Lack of skills among teachers in developing gender-sensitive instructional materials.	42	23	89	73	2.15	Disagreed
4	Lack of institutional support for gender-responsive instructional materials.	67	77	32	51	2.70	Agreed
5	Attitude of teachers to gender-sensitive instructional materials	109	84	23	11	3.28	Strongly Agreed

Table 4 shows the mean ratings of respondents on constraints to the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials by teachers. The item 3 received a mean rating below the criterion mean, which indicates that teachers disagreed that lack of skills among teachers constituted constraints to the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials. The rest of

the items, however were rated above the criterion mean. They were rated from 2.70 to 3.28. These show that the items constituted constraints to the utilization of instructional materials.

Discussion

The application of gender-sensitive instructional materials is most important at the basic education level where children are still in their formative age. Teachers have onerous role to play in ensuring this. Determining teachers' level of understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials, their attitude to same and the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials at that level becomes a worthwhile effort.

The study found that teachers have appreciable level of understanding of gender-sensitive instructional materials. They understand that instructional material that is gender-sensitive should portray both sexes in balanced manner; portray diverse roles of the sexes and their relationships. Such instructional materials should avoid gender stereotyping and roles; and provide diverse perspectives. Most teachers, however did not agree that gender-sensitive instructional materials need to use appropriate tone and language. The appreciable understanding of the concept of gender-sensitivity in instructional materials among teachers could be attributed to high level of awareness being created in this regard, as well as the emergence of policy documents like the African Union Gender Policy (2007) and the Nigeria's gender policy initiative.

While teachers understanding of the gender-sensitive instructional materials is appreciable, their attitude to this could be considered mixed. Teachers did not consider pupils' gender in their choice of instructional material. Other manifestations of poor attitude include not seeing anything wrong in the current gender-blind instructional materials in use; and viewing analysis of gender-compliant instructional materials as a waste of time. On a good note, however, teachers disagreed that school curricula should not be in conflict with male-dominated traditional culture; and also believed that pupils will benefit more from gender-balanced instructional materials. This indicates that with proper value reorientation, teachers will cultivate better attitude to gender equity.

Teachers are found to utilize gender-sensitive instructional materials to a low extent. Teachers do not use textbooks that reflect gender balance; and materials that portray female and male characters in equal numbers and involved in similar activities. They also, do not review existing materials that are lopsided; and neither do they assist pupils to challenge stereotypes in the portrayal of female and male characters in the teaching/learning materials. The finding is in line with their less than appreciable attitude to gender-sensitive instructional materials. This confirms the position of Unterhalter et al (2015) that the knowledge and attitudes of teachers are important for building and sustaining ideas and institutions oriented to gender equality. With clear understanding and positive disposition to gender issues, teachers will more likely employ gender-sensitive instructional materials.

It is however, somewhat complementary that teachers use gender responsive illustrations which are displayed on classroom walls to give a gender responsive classroom environment. Illustrations on the classroom walls easily catch the attention of pupils, and it is good that this practice is also extended to textbooks and other instructional materials.

To achieve this, however, requires addressing certain constraints to the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials such as scarcity of gender-balance textbooks, difficulty in reviewing available instructional materials for gender responsiveness, lack of institutional

support for gender-responsive instructional materials and poor attitude of teachers to gender-sensitive instructional materials.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, it is recommended as follows:

1. The Federation of African Women in Education (FAWE) should intensify her effort in creating awareness on gender-sensitivity in pedagogy.
2. Nigerian government should muster the political will to ensure that the education system responds to the provisions of the African Union Gender Policy as well as the Nigeria's home brand Gender Policy.
3. The Basic Education Commission and Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council should work together to ensure that textbooks in use in the basic education comply with gender-sensitivity principles.
4. Institutions should provide adequate support for the review available instructional materials to comply with Gender Policy agenda.
5. Teachers should be assisted through seminars and workshops to acquire the right attitude and skills in the utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials.

Conclusion

Teacher's understanding, attitude and utilization of gender-sensitive instructional materials provide a tripartite mechanism to determine their status on gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level. Teachers demonstrate appreciable understanding of the concept of gender-sensitivity, mixed attitude towards gender-sensitive instructional materials but, do not utilize gender-sensitive instructional materials adequately. There is the need to address certain constraints in order to ensure the implementation of gender-sensitive instructional materials at the basic education level.

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