

Educators' Gender and Ideological Beliefs Versus Alternative Traditions of Teaching Social Studies in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research examined the preferred alternative traditions of teaching social studies of sampled educators divided into groups based on gender and ideological beliefs about learners. A sampled group of 313 social studies educators in junior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria was surveyed. The educators positively endorsed all the four traditions, citizenship transmission, social science, reflective inquiry and the democratic transformation, in varying degrees. The ideological beliefs of educators made more significant difference than did gender in differentiating their preferences for the alternative traditions. Educators exhibited a more positive preference for the citizenship transmission but reacted less positively toward the social science, reflective inquiry and the democratic transformation tradition. Implications for instructional development are suggested.

1. Introduction

In Nigeria, educators have chosen the concept of social studies as a means of teaching citizenship. Most educational systems do not teach social studies but rather expect history and social science content to carry the burden of teaching citizenship. The concept and prospects of the integrated social studies which seemed to have gained acceptance in African countries, including Nigeria in the 1960s were finally adopted by the African educators who met in Mombasa, Kenya in 1968 (African Social Studies Programme (ASSP), 1968). Social studies is viewed as a vehicle for passing on the knowledge developed by the society, including the scholarly disciplines, with the purpose of helping young people understand and make use of it (Kissock, 1981). The national educational goals in Nigeria which support the teaching of social studies in schools are among others: "the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, and the training of the mind to understand the world around" (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004:8).

Determining effective teaching has been a challenge for education researchers. Johnson (1973) describes teaching as "involving the consideration of the nature of the child, the goals to be achieved and finally the methods and materials required to attain the goals" (p. 48). Teaching involves developing a policy and putting that policy into practice. There are at least four social studies traditions one of which educators can be grouped in. This study identified the four traditions as: citizenship transmission, social science, reflective inquiry (Barr, Barth and Shermis, 1977) and democratic transformation (Lee, 2004) versus educators' gender and ideological beliefs in the achievement of the citizenship education goal through social studies programme for investigation.

Gender and Teaching-Learning Process

There has been a widespread belief that teaching is a woman's job to the extent that the concept 'teacher' when used impersonally is feminized as 'she' (Ezewu, 1982). Gross and Trask (1965) investigated the differences between male and female headteachers. Although no significant sex differences between male and female headteachers and classroom teachers were observed, the study did indicate that women teachers gave more importance to individual differences among pupils and showed more concern for social and emotional developments of their pupils than male teachers.

Adam and Biddle (1970) noted that male teachers' lessons exhibit more non-involved persons than do lessons of female teachers. Again, they observed that male teachers disseminate more information about relevant subject matter and situation than do female teachers. Finally, the study indicated that male teachers are more likely to be emitters than are female teachers. However, research evidence on the relationship between gender differences and classroom instructions is not yet conclusive. For instance, a somewhat divergent but early finding by McGee (1965) revealed that female teachers showed more directness than did the male teachers. In other words, male teachers were found to be indirect. Nevertheless, there appears to be greater evidence of dominance on the classroom scene by male teachers than there is by female teachers.

Wubbels, Brekelmans, vanTartwijk and Admiral (1999) identified appropriate dominance as an important characteristic of effective student – teacher relationship. They defined dominance as the teacher's ability to provide clear purpose and strong guidance regarding both academic and student's behavior. For example, in a study that involved interviews with more than 700 students in grades 4-7, students articulated a clear preference for strong teacher's guidance and control rather than more permissive types of teacher's behavior (Chiu and Tulley, 1997).

According to McCray (1997), women believed themselves highly capable of and responsible for their students' achievement. Women tend to view connecting home, community and school as an important factor in students' school achievement (McCray, Sanderlar, Kilgore and Neal, 2002). Finally, Tschannen-Moran, Hoy and Hoy (1998) noted that, "studies of efficacy tend to focus on the knowledge and beliefs of teachers and not on the cultural meaning of efficacy in terms of the roles, expectations and social relations that are important in the construction of those teachers' beliefs" (p.203). There is a need therefore, to explore further the impact of gender on the achievement of citizenship education goal within the context of the four alternative traditions of teaching social studies.

Ideological Beliefs and Teaching-Learning Process

The relationship between teachers' beliefs about specific educational practices and the quality of implementation of relevant instructional methods has been subjected to careful analyses by researchers (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Sparks, 1988). Research demonstrates that there are important relationships between the two variables (Kagan, 1992). However, teachers not only hold beliefs about the wisdom and efficacy of specific practices, but they also maintain that educational beliefs of a more ideological nature may be directly or indirectly related to teachers' decision making (Munby, 1982).

Teachers' ideological beliefs have been defined by Kagan (1992) as, "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms and the academic materials to be taught" (p.65). Nespor (1987) specified that teachers' beliefs have a number of properties among them are: (1) they sometimes contain assumptions about the existence of entities beyond the teacher's control or influence; (2) they derive much of their power from memories of specific events; (3) they are not open to critical examination or outside evaluation, and (4) the domains to which specific beliefs may apply are undefined. These properties distinguish beliefs and belief systems from knowledge (Joram and Gabriele, 1998:176).

There are several studies indicating that educators' ideological beliefs impact upon their planning and classroom behavior (Bussis, Chittendon and Amarel, 1976; Zak and Horowitz, 1985). Since educators' beliefs about specific pedagogical practices are heavily grounded in their personal experiences (Guskey, 1986), there is good reason to assert that educators' ideological beliefs are related directly or indirectly to their instructional planning and implementation.

Accepting the existence of alternative traditions of teaching social studies such as citizenship transmission, social science model, reflective inquiry and the democratic transformation, each with its own ideological base, and attempting to determine how educators' ideological beliefs impact on the classroom practice within the context of the four traditions might contribute significantly to the achievement of the citizenship education goal of social studies.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined educators' gender and ideological beliefs and their predisposition to social studies traditions in the achievement of the citizenship education goal of social studies. It was assumed that understanding the educators' predisposition to the alternative traditions can be helpful in the selection of content and methods consistent with the desired citizenship education goal of teaching social studies in Nigerian schools. Without the evaluation of educators' predisposition to the alternative traditions of teaching social studies against the curriculum goal, there exists little basis for improving the curriculum implementation goal. Educators would have great reluctance to change their status quo of instructional approach without adequate proof of need. Identifying the role of educators' gender and ideological beliefs about learners and their predisposition to the four alternative traditions to teaching social studies would aid researchers who may wish to investigate other factors that inform educators' theory choice.

2. Methodology

Subjects

In the 2010/11 academic year there was a total of 447 (150 male and 297 female) social studies educators in the 241 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to obtain the sample for the study on the basis of 70% of the population of each gender group. Hence, the sample size of the study consisted of 313 (105 male and 208 female) social studies educators.

The educators ranged in age from 24 to 51 years and the distribution into the ideological beliefs groups was as follows: negative predisposition (n = 268), and positive predisposition (n = 45). The sample included only educators who graduated from Colleges of Education or university with specialization in social studies education.

Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the preference for the alternative traditions of teaching social studies among educators divided into groups based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the preference for the alternative traditions of teaching social studies among educators divided into groups based on ideological beliefs.

Instrumentation

The research instruments consisted of "Educators' Variables Questionnaire" (EVQ) and the "Alternative Traditions Preference Scale" (ATPS).

Educators' Variables Questionnaire (EVQ)

The independent variables of this study included both the gender and the ideological beliefs of educators. Educators' ideological beliefs were measured using a 13-item instrument that used a 5-point Likert-type

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rating scale with 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (undecided), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The ideological beliefs questionnaire was developed by the researcher. It was used to pinpoint educators' beliefs about learning and teaching which should be taken into account when teaching students. Some educators hold the belief that "students are intellectually passive and require basic skills taught in direct manner" (Zahorik, 1990, p.69). This belief is classified "negative belief"; while others believe that "students are internally motivated inquirers who need functional knowledge, and respond to a way of teaching that provides freedom and support" (Zahorik, 1990, p.70). This belief is classified "positive belief". The scientific value and usefulness of this type of questionnaire has been established in research studies (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Lonka, Joram & Bryson, 1996; Wubbels, 1992).

Content validity to ensure internal consistency was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty members and school administrators. Pilot-testing for suitability and reliability was carried out with social studies educators in schools not included in the sample. The Spearman-Brown split-half formula applied to the analysis of the data yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78.

All the 313 participants in this study completed the EVQ. The possible responses to the questionnaire items ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). However, the rating scores were reversed for negative items. The neutral score was 3, thus, the composite score for each educator's rating of the ideological instrument (13 items) ranged between 65 (maximum) and 13 (minimum). A favourable direction for the ideological beliefs was therefore placed between 40 and 65 while unfavourable disposition was between 13 and 39. Eighty-six percent (268) of the sample came under the negative ideological belief group while 14% (45) of the sample constituted the positive ideological belief group. Frequency count was employed in the distribution of the respondents into the gender group after the sampling process.

Alternative Traditions Preference Scale (ATPS)

The alternative traditions preference scale used in this study is a modified version of Barth-Shermis Scale (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1978) and Lee's (2004) democratic transformation tradition. It is a 60-item Likert-type instrument which covers how citizenship education content should be selected, organized (method) and taught (purpose). The possible responses to the items range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Barth-Shermis Scale is concerned with three alternative traditions (citizenship transmission, social science and reflective inquiry) while the fourth dimension is Lee's democratic transformation model. Each of the four alternative traditions is represented by a discrete set of 15 items randomly intermingled in terms of purpose, method and content of citizenship education. The ATPS was modified and used without formal permission from the authors since it was not possible to do so. This study hereby acknowledges the authors by citing their names against the sources of the information.

Content validity of the instrument to ensure internal consistency was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty members in the Department of social studies, political science professors and school administrators. Pilot-testing for suitability and reliability was conducted with social studies educators in schools not included in the sample. The split-half reliability coefficient for citizenship transmission was 0.86; social science, 0.82; reflective inquiry, 0.78 and democratic transformation, 0.75 respectively.

All the 313 respondents in the study completed the ATPS. The respondents' perspectives toward a conceptual alternative tradition were gleaned from their agreement or disagreement with the 15 representative statements for each of the four traditions in terms of purpose, method and content of teaching social studies with the overriding goal of citizenship education. The possible responses to the ATPS items ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The general rule for interpreting the ATPS is that "the lower your total score, the more strongly you agree with the statements in the cell and the higher the number the more strongly you disagree with the statement" (DuBey &

Barth, 1980, pp. 31-32). The neutral score was 3, thus, the composite score for each alternative tradition ranged between 15 (minimum) and 75 (maximum). A positive predisposition toward a particular alternative tradition was therefore placed between 15 and 44 while a negative predisposition scores to the traditions were between 45 and 75.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Copies of the questionnaires, “Educators Variables Questionnaire” and the “Alternative Traditions Preference Scale” were personally delivered to the social studies educators in the schools involved in the study. The instruments were collected back from the participants with the aid of research assistants on school-to-school basis. Responses were obtained from all the 313 participants in the study.

The feedback which the respondents gave on the various sub-sets in the Educators’ Variables Questionnaire along with their composite scores in each of the alternative traditions of teaching social studies yielded the data for the study. The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the overall significance of each hypothesis while the univariate analysis of variance (UANOVA) test was employed to explain on which of the alternative traditions the differences occurred. Data were described using means and standard deviations. The t-test were used to establish significant differences in educators’ preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies based on gender and ideological beliefs (Table 2 and 4).

3. Results

Gender of Educators

Data on gender in determining the alternative traditions preference of educators in social studies teaching are reported in Table 1. The data show that there was no significant difference among educators in their overall preference for the alternative traditions of teaching social studies. But the t-test computation in Table 2 indicates that significant differences occurred in respect of social science, reflective inquiry and the democratic transformation.

Ideological Beliefs of Educators

Data reporting ideological beliefs in determining the difference in educators’ preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies are presented in Table 3. Educators in the two ideological belief groups – negative (those who hold the belief that students are intellectually passive and require foundational knowledge) and positive (educators who believe that students are internally motivated inquirers who need functional knowledge to respond to a way of teaching) differed significantly in their predisposition to the alternative traditions of teaching social studies. The t-test analysis in Table 4 shows that the significant difference occurred only on the reflective inquiry tradition.

Table 1. Analysis of variance of educators’ preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies by gender (N = 313)

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significant of F
Gender					
Main Effects	13.841	1	13.841	0.049 ^{n.s}	0.824
Explained	13.841	1	13.841	0.049 ^{n.s}	0.824
Residual	87350.019	311	280.868		
Total	87363.859	312	280.012		

n.s = not significant

Table 2. t-test analysis of educators' preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies by gender (N = 313)

Gender	N	Citizenship Transmission			Social Sciences			Reflective Inquiry			Democratic Transformation		
		Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t
Male	105	65.63	3.65	1.02 ^{n.s}	52.61	5.34	2.24*	39.09	4.83	13.76*	23.48	7.56	7.67*
Female	208	66.05	3.38		54.18	6.05		26/62	8.63		34.39	13.56	

n.s = not significant *significant at p < 0.05

Table 3. Analysis of variance of educators' preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies by ideological beliefs (N=313)

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significant of F
Ideological Beliefs					
Main Effects	1467.944	1	1467.944	5.32*	0.022
Explained	1467.944	1	1467.944	5.32*	0.022
Residual		311	276.193		
Total =	85895.916	312	280.012		
	87363.859				

*significant at p < 0.05

Table 4. t-test analysis of educators' preference for alternative traditions of teaching social studies by ideological beliefs (N=313)

Ideological Beliefs	N	Citizenship Transmission			Social Science			Reflective Inquiry			Democratic Transformation		
		Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	t
Negative	268	65.98	3.45	0.88 ^{n.s}	53.71	5.94	0.43 ^{n.s}	29.76	9.74	4.90*	30.77	12.77	0.11 ^{n.s}
Positive	45	65.49	3.60		53.31	5.39		37.06	5.39		30.53	14.18	

n.s = not significant *significant at p < 0.05

4. Discussion of Results

Gender of Educators in Alternative Traditions of Teaching Social Studies

Male educators were more favourably predisposed to the reflective inquiry while the female educators were more favourably predisposed toward the democratic transformation but the two groups were equally favourable to the citizenship transmission. The findings of this study are supported by the works of Gross and Trask (1965) and Fishel and Pottker (1973) where it was found that women teachers showed more concern for social and emotional developments of their students than do male teachers. Adams and Biddle (1970) noted that "male teachers' lessons often exhibit more non-involved persons than do lessons of female teachers" (p. 72). Again, they observed that male teachers disseminate more information about relevant subject matter and situation than do female teachers.

This study in which male and female educators are equally favourably predisposed to the citizenship transmission tradition is supported by Engle (1971) who remarked that social studies instruction has been used “to unite and nationalize a people around a certain preferred values” (p. 282). Kennedy (1991) noted that transmission of historical information creates inclusive societies and helps to provide a strong sense of community for many nations. Nigeria as a multicultural society uses social studies as a vehicle for promoting national integration among its various ethnic nationalities. Therefore, since cultural transmission is closely related to the ideology of essentialism (Wingo, 1966) educators in Nigerian schools tend to be guided in their social studies instructional approach by the philosophy identified for the nation’s educational goal which among others includes the promotion of “ national consciousness and unity of the people” (FRN, 2004:7).

The preference for other traditions especially the reflective inquiry by the male educators tends to suggest that male teachers believe in critical thinking and inquiry skills as tools for effective citizenship. This finding corroborates Nigeria’s stated national objectives for citizenship education which are the “development of critical thinking and inquiry skills and ability to contribute to the improvement of society” (FRN, 2004:14). But the fact that female teachers favoured democratic transformation tradition more than the male educators could be assumed to indicate that women educators believe in adolescents’ capacity to understand and critically analyze the world around them. This is corroborated by the findings of Maxcy and Stanly (1981) which indicated that since most of the power of intellect is developed at early age, it would be indefensible to exclude secondary school students from serious discussions of the role of the citizen.

Ideological Beliefs of Educators in Alternative Traditions of Teaching

Social Studies

In this study, a significant difference was found between the two ideological belief groups only in respect of their predisposition toward the reflective inquiry. There were no significant differences between the two groups with regard to citizenship transmission, social science and the democratic transformation traditions. This finding tends to portray the educators as being closely aligned with citizenship transmission, social science and the democratic transformation traditions, thus giving a picture of two traditions instead of four. White (1982) and Brophy (1990) findings in their respective studies add credence to the finding of this study.

White (1982) in a study found teachers choosing from three models (citizenship transmission, social science and reflective inquiry). He also found that reflective inquiry and social science model were fairly closely aligned in the minds of the respondents with the result that the study found two models instead of three. Brophy’s (1990) study observed classroom teachers “using all the three traditions but providing less emphasis on the democratic transformation” (p. 351).

Educators who hold positive ideological belief about students were better predisposed to reflective inquiry. This finding could be accounted for as a reflection of Nigeria’s national policy on education requirement in the function of schools. The policy expects schools to raise a generation of people, who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others (FRN, 2004:18). This in effect calls for the application of reflective inquiry. Educators who hold positive ideological belief might have seen reflective inquiry as a step in the direction of looking at social values but in the context of decision-making and value analysis and clarification only. The educators while holding strongly to the positive endorsement of the citizenship transmission tradition mixed it up with the radical tradition of reflective inquiry in an attempt to align their teaching with Nigeria’s expectation of developing in learners’ critical thinking, inquiry skills and ability to contribute to the improvement of the society (FRN, 2004:14).

By mixing the alternative traditions of teaching social studies in attempt to achieve the citizenship education goal of the subject, educators might have been influenced by their lack of analysis of the

nation's education goals. They might have also been influenced by their academic background of either humanities or the social sciences as well as the social and political constraint hence the more positive preference for the citizenship transmission.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The research examined perceived educators' variables of gender and ideological beliefs vis-à-vis the alternative traditions of teaching social studies and found that educators positively endorsed all the four alternative traditions of teaching social studies but in varying degrees. The ideological beliefs of educators made more significant difference than did gender in differentiating their preferences for the alternative traditions of teaching social studies. Educators seemed to believe in the dominant contribution of the citizenship transmission to the achievement of the citizenship education goal of social studies. They exhibited a more positive preference for the citizenship transmission and reacted less positively toward the social science, reflective inquiry and the democratic transformation models.

Mere understanding of the educators' preferences for the alternative traditions of teaching social studies may not identify a single instructional approach best for all educators, but it does offer a range of options and those most likely to succeed. One special implication of the findings of this study is that educators should distinguish carefully between the ends they are trying to achieve in social studies programme and the means which they are using to achieve them. The educators in this study were eclectic in their predisposition toward the alternative traditions of teaching social studies; it is recommended that the alternative traditions be used as a means of analyzing and evaluating citizenship education goal of social studies rather than for organizing the field.

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