

ENHANCING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA THROUGH GENDER RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

English language proficiency is not only a fundamental skill but also a gateway to educational, economic and social opportunities in today's globalized world. However, despite the recognized significance of English language in the country and globally, there exist challenges and disparities in how it is taught and learned in secondary schools particularly concerning gender dynamics. This research therefore explored how the adoption of gender responsive pedagogy could promote gender parity in schools. The research adopted the descriptive survey. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 77 English language teachers from schools in Nsukka Local Government area of Enugu state. It found that even though English language teachers treated both girls and boys equally in the classrooms, they lacked the knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy and did not give equal leadership opportunities to males and females. The paper recommends that ministry of education should mainstream gender responsive pedagogy as a policy in all pre-service teacher training centers, the school management should provide teaching and learning materials that are gender responsive and English language teachers should incorporate direct voices and perspectives in English language materials and activities to reflect gender equality.

Keywords: English language teaching, Gender responsive pedagogy, Secondary schools, Gender inclusivity in education, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

English language proficiency is not only a fundamental skill but also a gateway to educational, economic and social opportunities in today's globalized world. In the context of Nigeria where English language serves as a medium of Instruction in schools and a major subject which is one of the yardsticks to gain admission into the higher institutions in the country and a lingua franca in various spheres of life. The importance of effective English language teaching and learning cannot be overstated as it is very important for both the female and male students.

However, despite recognized significance of English language in the country and globally, their exist challenges and disparities in how it is taught and learned in secondary schools particularly concerning gender dynamics. This sets the stage for exploring the potential of gender responsive pedagogy as a means to address these challenges and enhance English language teaching and learning in Secondary schools in Nsukka local government area in Enugu state.

Despite ongoing efforts to achieve gender parity, gender inequality remains prevalent in the educational attainment of males and females at all levels in developing nations (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). Sub-Saharan Africa is the region that ranks the lowest in terms of achieving gender equality in education among all nations.

Research has revealed that girls and boys possess comparable intellectual capabilities until the age of twelve, at which point subtle variations emerge. However, it is worth noting that societal expectations regarding achievement, particularly as conveyed by parents and teachers, can significantly impact girls' belief in their ability to succeed. Since birth, the presence of gender has a profound influence on how society shapes the development of both females and males. Children absorb these societal expectations from their parents and significant others leading to the formation of gender-related attitudes and actions during their formative years (Esen, 2013; Kyazike, 2016; Munene & Wambiya, 2019).

In addition to the home environment, it is worth noting that school plays a significant role in the process of socialization (Saldana, 2013). Within the realm of education, it is evident that there exist multiple facets that exhibit elements of sexism. Like other languages, English language is full of forms that can be used in ways that discriminate against a group of people. Although males are not exempt from linguistic sexism, women tend to be more affected. Many times, teachers are not aware of situations that are discriminatory in the basis of gender. They may use learning materials that depict only one gender performing certain types of activities or they make disparaging remarks about the capability or characteristics of either gender. This discourages the students from participating effectively in the teaching and learning of school subjects including the English language. What happens in the teaching and learning processes in the classroom plays a big role in determining how well girls and boys participate in education and whether they stay in school and do well in their studies. School is anticipated to serve as a conducive learning environment for all children. In order to counter the prevailing gender prejudice within a patriarchal system, it is crucial to employ gender responsive pedagogy (Abrha, Kellkay, & Seifu, 2023).

Pedagogy encompasses all aspects of teaching and learning, including the content, teaching process, and teaching methods within the classroom setting (Chapin & Warne, 2020). They went further to define Gender responsive pedagogy as the teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of female and male students. Gender responsive pedagogy requires teachers to adopt a comprehensive gender approach in lesson preparation, teaching, classroom management, and performance evaluation. Teachers can promote gender parity by implementing gender-responsive teaching both within and outside the classroom. The teaching and learning techniques in the majority of schools in Africa, namely Nigeria, are predominantly influenced by gender biases. Developing gender-responsive pedagogy involves incorporating gender considerations into all educational activities conducted by teachers. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 2018) states that in order to implement gender responsive pedagogy effectively, instructors need to undergo training to shift their mentality. It is necessary to provide instructors with the necessary information, abilities, and attitudes to effectively address the learning needs of both girls and boys. This can be achieved by implementing gender-responsive classroom processes and practices. Put simply, it is important to structure and execute all classroom transactions, negotiations, curricular and co-curricular activities in a manner that guarantees equal treatment and opportunities for both genders, without any cognitive, emotional, or practical disadvantages. Teachers must possess a deep understanding of the Gender responsive pedagogy and actively implement it.

Teachers may intentionally or unknowingly uphold and sustain gender bias and inequality. In many schools, teachers are not aware of gender sensitive teaching practice or gender responsive pedagogy and they do not address gender inequality in their teaching practices (Kahamba, Massawe & Kara, 2017). English language teachers may bear additional responsibility as they tend to have more frequent interactions with pupils compared to other teachers. English language teachers are essential in facilitating communication at the basic, secondary, and

postsecondary levels of education. English is a mandatory subject and serves as the medium of communication for all subjects in the curriculum. Typically, when it comes to matters of language and communication in schools, other teachers and even the school administration tend to yield to the authority of the English language teacher. Additionally, the educational materials employed by English language teachers might exacerbate gender disparity within the classroom. Mustapha (2014) conducted a study on seven commonly used English Language textbooks in Nigerian schools. The study revealed that men were disproportionately represented in public domains such as engineering, accountancy, medicine, and politics, while women were disproportionately represented in the domestic sector. Mustapha's research supported Blumerg's (2008) assertion that despite improvements in gender equality in education, subtle issues such as gender bias can still exist in teaching materials and methods.

Ananga (2021) outlines specific acts and methods that should be displayed in the classroom to implement gender responsive pedagogy. Teachers are supposed to provide equal opportunities for both female and male students to participate in class discussions, ensuring that girls who may lack confidence receive additional encouragement; employ participatory methodologies such as collaborative activities, discussions, and simulated scenarios; and ensure gender equality in participation, including providing additional support as necessary; ensure careful consideration of the spatial arrangement of females and males during collaborative tasks and designate females with leadership responsibilities; provide gender parity in the provision of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), such as books and desks, provide equitable access for females, especially in cases where males exhibit greater assertiveness and prioritize resource acquisition; exercise patience with individuals, regardless of their gender, who may exhibit shyness or fear when it comes to verbal communication; assess the comprehension of the lecture among both girls and males; offer constructive and positive verbal feedback to all students, regardless of their gender, in the classroom. The aforementioned points center around gender-responsive pedagogies and their implementation in the classroom, as well as its integration into the overall school culture and atmosphere.

The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which gender responsive pedagogy is integrated into the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Nsukka local government area. Specifically the study aims to: explore teachers' knowledge regarding gender responsive pedagogy and identify current practices in English language teaching with regards to gender responsiveness. The study is therefore provided answers to the following research questions

- 1) To what extent do English language teachers have the knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy?
- 2) What are the current practices in integrating gender responsive pedagogy into English language teaching and learning in Nsukka local government area?

The study is guided by a theoretical framework that draws on feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy theories. Feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of challenging traditional gender roles and power dynamics in education while critical pedagogy by Freire (1968) highlights the need to address social inequalities and promote social justice through education. He emphasizes the importance of dialogue and critical consciousness in the educational system. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to explore the potential of Gender responsive pedagogy to challenge gender norms, empower students and promote equitable educational outcomes in English language teaching and learning in secondary schools in Nsukka local government area.

Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design aims at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics features or facts about a given population (Nworgu,2015). This study was conducted in Nsukka local government area of Enugu state Nigeria. Population of the study consist all the 125 English language teachers in 29 public secondary schools in Nsukka local government area. There are 29 secondary schools in Nsukka local government, 17 out of the secondary schools are co educational while 12 are single sex schools. The sample size of the study consists 77 English language teachers purposively sampled. Purposive sample was used because the study needed teachers who are in coeducational schools as that is where gender responsiveness can clearly be practiced. The instrument used for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. It is a 20-item questionnaire titled ‘enhancing English language teaching and learning through gender responsive pedagogy questionnaire (EELTLGRPQ). The instrument was validated by three experts, two from Arts Education one from Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded overall reliability of 0.89. A total number of 77 questionnaires were distributed and retrieved on the spot and this ensured 100%collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data. The criterion mean is 2.50. Any item mean above 2.5 is accepted while any item below 2.5 is rejected.

Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the guiding research questions

Research Question 1: what is the extent of English language teachers’ knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy?

Table 1: Mean response on English language Teachers’ knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	I am familiar with the concept of gender responsive pedagogy	1.85	.70	Rejected
2.	I understand the importance of integrating gender responsive approaches in English language teaching	1.64	.53	Rejected
3	I am aware of specific teaching strategies that can promote gender equity in the English language classroom	1.87	.71	Rejected
4.	I have received training or professional development related to gender responsive pedagogy	2.14	.70	Rejected
5.	I actively incorporate gender responsive practices in my English language teaching	2.28	.79	Rejected
6.	I feel confident in my ability to address gender related issues in the English language classroom	1.88	.88	Rejected
7.	I believe gender responsive pedagogy enhances the learning experience for all atudents	2.33	.99	Rejected
8.	I actively seek out resources and materials that support gender responsive teaching practices	2.14	.70	Rejected

9.	I collaborate with colleagues to share and learn about gender responsive teaching strategies	1.68	.59	Rejected
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Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of respondents on their knowledge of the gender responsive pedagogy. The results obtained show that items 1-9 had mean ratings of 1.85,1.64,1.87, 2.14, 2.80, 1.88, 2.28, 1.88, 2.33, 2.14, 1.68 respectively with standard deviations of .70, .53, .71, .70, .79, .88, .99, .70, .59 . These mean values are within the range of 1.50- 2.49 which are below the benchmark value of 2.50. This implies that the majority of the English language teachers have little or no knowledge of the gender responsive pedagogy.

Research Question 2: what are the current practices of integrating gender responsive pedagogy by English language teachers in Nsukka local government?

Table 2: Mean response of English language teachers’ gender responsive pedagogy practices

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
10.	I create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that respects gender differences	2.93	.86	Accepted
11	I make sure females and males equally participate in activities during English language lesson	3.32	.57	Accepted
12	Both females and males equally participate in class presentation, project works and discussion	3.42	.63	Accepted
13	I assign leadership roles equally to females and males during English language lesson activities	2.06	.74	Rejected
14.	I am patient with females and males who may be shy or afraid to speak	3.02	.94	Accepted
15.	I mix females and males to work together in groups	2.96	.19	Accepted
16.	I provide feedback to both female and male students in class	2.01	.11	Rejected
17	I use teaching materials that show or reinforce traditional roles (e.g. women cooking/cleaning and men in professional roles)	3.90	.28	Accepted
18	I provide opportunities for male and female students to explore and challenge traditional gender roles and expectation through English language lessons	2.02	.76	Rejected
19	I integrate discussions and activities that address gender equity and social justice into my English language lessons	2.00	.42	Rejected
20	I continuously reflect on and improve my teaching practices to better address gender related needs	1.98	.11	Rejected

Table 2 above shows the mean and standard deviations of respondents on the practices of gender responsive pedagogy in the English language classroom. The results showed that the teachers practiced some of the gender responsive strategies to a high extent while some were not practiced well. Items 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 obtained the mean ratings of 2.93, 3.32, 3.42, 3.02 ,3.90 respectively and the standard deviation of .86, .57, .63, .94, .28 respectively. These mean ratings fall within the range of 2.50 and above which is above the benchmark value of 2.50. this implies that English language teachers apply the following gender responsive

strategies while items 13,16, 18, 19, 20 obtained the mean ratings of 2.06, 2.01, 2.02, 2.00, 1.98 respectively and standard deviation of .74, .11, .76, .42, .11 respectively. These mean values are within the range of 1.5 – 2.49 which is below the benchmark of 2.50. This implies that the English language teachers apply these gender responsive pedagogy strategies to a low extent.

Discussion of results

On the research question of the extent the English language teachers have the knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy , the result shows that majority of the teachers do not have the knowledge of gender responsive pedagogy and have not received training of such. This agrees with different researchers that the ability of teachers to adopt and practice gender responsive pedagogy starts with their understanding and knowledge of the concept (Kahamba et al., 2017, FAWE 2016, Issaka, Hammond, Adams, & Kissi,2021). It is also in line with different studies that indicated that although most teachers have received little or no training on gender parity in schools at both pre service and in service level, the government seems to be asking them to implement pedagogies that will promote gender parity (Issaka et al., 2021, Mustapha 2014). The responses from respondents show that they require training in gender responsive pedagogy to fully transform school and English language classroom practice to be gender sensitive.

Research question 2 which seeks insight to the various classroom practices of English language teachers that portrays the use of gender responsive pedagogy showed that majority of teachers gave equal opportunities to male and females to participate actively in class activities. This is made possible because during group work, class presentation, project work and discussion, both females and males are encouraged to participate and the shy students are also given the opportunity to participate. This finding corresponds with that of Issaka et al., (2021) that although teachers gave equal opportunities to male and female students in class, most of their practices were not gender responsive.

The findings of this study reveal that equal leadership opportunities were not given to female and male students during English language activities that require group work. The findings also revealed that majority of the teachers did not give opportunities in class for students to explore and challenge traditional gender roles and expectations during English language lesson. The teachers do not also integrate these discussions and activities that address gender equity and social injustice into their English language lessons. This is in line with the study of Kahamba et al., (2017), they opined that teachers may intentionally or unknowingly uphold and sustain gender bias and inequality, they may not be aware of gender sensitive teaching practice or gender responsive pedagogy and thereby may not address gender inequality in their teaching practices.

The findings of the study revealed also that majority of English language teachers use teaching materials that show or reinforce traditional roles (e.g. women cooking/cleaning and men in professional roles). This is in line Mustapha (2014) who discovered that most instructional resources used by teacher reinforce gender inequity in the classroom. In his study of seven English Language textbooks popularly used in Nigerian schools, Mustapha found that males were overrepresented in the public domain in professions like engineering, accountancy, medicine, and politics, while females were overrepresented in the home sphere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, implementing gender responsive pedagogy in English language teaching and learning within Nsukka local government area presents a significant opportunity to foster

inclusivity, challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality. By engaging teachers, school management, government authorities, parents and students in collaborative efforts, we can create a learning environment that not only enhances English language proficiency but also cultivates a culture of respect, equity and diversity.

Recommendations

1. The ministry of education should mainstream gender responsive pedagogy as a policy in all pre service teacher training centers. The pre service and in service English language teachers should be exposed to pedagogical trainings and professional development courses that focus on how to design and implement English language lessons that incorporate gender responsive pedagogies.
2. The school management should provide teaching and learning materials that are gender responsive. In addition, the management should formulate, apply and monitor rules and regulations that address issues that will transform the school into a gender responsive environment.
3. English language teachers should incorporate direct voices and perspectives in English language materials and activities to reflect gender equality. They should provide models that challenge stereotypes and promote gender sensitivity in their lessons.

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