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VOL. 1 NO. 2, JULY 2012 AN ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF GENDER  
RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM AT THE BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL

By

Florence Omumu,\* Pauline, Tibi, Olufunke Chenube\* &

Olutomilayo Ariyibi\*

#### Abstract

Empirical evidences abound on gender disparities in enrolment, attrition, teaching and learning processes in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Gender bias and disparity reflect in the class layout, class records, class structure, discipline matters, use of materials and tools, student- teacher interaction etc.. This cross sectional study assessed the degree of gender responsiveness in classrooms of six randomly selected junior secondary schools in Ika North Local Govt of Delta State. Quantitative data were collected using Gender Responsive Classroom Questionnaire (GRCQ) from learners and teachers. The results of the study indicated low degrees of gender responsiveness in some classroom components. There is the need for sensitization of school heads to mainstream gender in the entire school system. It is also necessary to equip teachers with knowledge, skills and attitude for gender responsive pedagogy that ensures equity 14 among boys and girls in schools.

#### Introduction

Social construction of gender affects attitudes, roles, responsibilities and expectation of males and females within a cultural context. These are influenced by a complex array of ideological, cultural, religious influences that could be economical and historical. Gender as a social concept constitutes barriers to equality between persons in the society. [UNICEF Gender Training Manual, 2003]. The school as a reflection of societal values and ideals displays gender bias in the class in many forms. Gender disparities and inequalities manifest in the school management structure, class structure, use of materials/ resources/ tools, subjects offered, in textbooks/ pictorial and textual images presented of males and females, in the curriculum and career paths of learners, in the division of tasks and responsibilities, in disciplinary issues and use of language. Gender roles are consciously or unconsciously carried into the classrooms dynamics by both teachers and learners (Mlama et al, 2005).

The drive towards **5** elimination of gender disparities in schools has focused more on enrolment, retention and completion of education of males and females but gender influences the pedagogical activities and school structure.

According to Jung and Chung (2005) **3** gender equality education tends to be understood as simply providing male and female students with equal educational opportunities, fostering their androgyny, or teaching gender equality consciousness directly. However, gender equality education should be understood as not only eliminating gender discrimination, which could be inherent in educational practices (including the instructional behaviours of teachers). but also integrating **15** the experiences and needs of both female and male students into all educational practices and, ultimately, enabling them to overcome traditional gender relations through education. Thus, males and females should enjoy equal access to all pedagogical activities in the school and classroom. Boys should not be more favoured and visible than girls in all pedagogical activities in the school.

Gender bias in the classroom can only be eliminated through gender responsiveness.

Mlama et al [2005] opined that <sup>2</sup> a gender responsive school is one which the academic, social and physical environment and its surrounding community take into account the specific needs of both girls and boys. This implies that the teachers, parents, community

leaders and members, the boys and girls are all aware of and practice gender equality. In

<sup>2</sup> a gender responsive school the academic delivery, including teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials, classroom interaction, and management of academic processes is gender responsive.(Mlama,2006). In a study by Jung and Chung (2005) in

Republic of Korea they found that male students are likely to occupy teacher-student interaction, while female students are likely to remain as passive respondents, compared with male students; teachers use instructional language and teaching-learning materials that strengthen traditional gender role consciousness of students during lessons; the distribution of curriculum and school facilities by schools and teachers seemed to reinforce the existing gender segregation and gender differences in subjects that already show differential tendencies in achievement and participation <sup>16</sup> for male and female students.

Though in Nigeria gender disparity in education has attracted research concern, but the focus majorly has been on school enrolment, retention and completion at all levels of education (the low level of girls enrolment in Northern Nigeria, the high dropout of boys in South east), not much has been done on gender responsiveness classrooms, thus the paucity of literature and the need to fill this gap. Gender responsive classroom takes into account the elimination of all forms of gender bias and every child (boy or girl) is favoured and visible. Zakariya ( 2011) identified the following as elements <sup>2</sup> of a gender responsive classroom:

Use of class décor (posters, pictures, slogans and quotations) that equally feature male and female characters of equal status and as heroes, leaders and authors. Girls' and boys' work and life experience is reflected in the student story boards, art and displayed work.

Class lay out-equal numbers <sup>8</sup> of girls and boys sit at the front, middle and back seat

where they can hear and focus better.

Class structure-boys and girls are prefects, captains, monitors, heads of activity groups etc.girls and boys share all class and school chores.

Student resources-learning materials are shared equally, parents are encouraged to supply both sons and daughters with school materials.

Playground-male and female teachers supervise the playground and discipline boys and girls who are bullies. Play space, activities and equipment are equally shared by girls and boys.

Student-Teacher Interaction:|Teachers give equal eye contact and attention to each girl or boy irrespective of the sitting position. Boys and girls answer the same number of questions [a similar mix of easy and difficult questions].

Task and responsibilities- 5 Boys and girls are given tasks and responsibilities according to their difficulty or level of responsibility not according to their sex.

Discipline in the class and in the school which makes girls and boys know they are safe valued and protected from sexual harassment or other forms of violence or humiliation. All students are aware that abusing or mistreating others will not be allowed. Gender Responsiveness in the classroom makes teaching and learning environments gender responsive, child friendly, conducive for the realization of each child's potentials.

This is a baseline study on the gender responsive classrooms of schools in Delta State.

The aim 17 of the study was to find out from school heads the degree of gender responsiveness in the activities in the school. The study also looked at the perception of students on the gender responsiveness in their school.

## Method

The target population for the study comprised of the students in Junior Secondary I, 2 & 3 in Delta State but two Local Government Areas: Ika North and Ika South were randomly selected.The two local Government areas have a total number of 71 Junior Secondary 1, 2

& 3: 38 public and 33 private Six schools were selected randomly from these 71 schools and 300 students were drawn as participants for the study.

Table 1A: Demographic Variables of the Schools and Students Selected

School Type Frequency %

Private 3 50

Public 3 50

Gender of Heads of Schools Male 4 60

Female 2 40

Total 6

Gender of Teachers Male 70 36.84

Female 120 63.15

Total 190

No of school heads that have undergone gender sensitization training Those who attended training 1

Never attended 5

Total 6

Total no of teachers who have undergone gender sensitization training Those who attended training 3 1.5

Never attended 187 98.42

Total 190

Table 1A shows that the sampled schools comprised of three private schools and three public schools, four of the school Heads are males and two females, the six schools have 190 teachers:70 males and 120 females, only one out of six school heads and three teachers have attended Gender Sensitization Workshop. This is quite informative because Gender responsiveness cannot be effective without training of the relevant stake holders.

TABLE 1B: 10 Distribution of students based on gender and class

Variables F %

Gender

Male 155 51.67

Female 145 48.33

N 300

Class Junior Secondary 1 90 30

Junior Secondary 2 90 30

Junior Secondary 3 120 40

Table 1B shows that the 300 students participants are made of 145 females (48.3%) and 155(51.67%) males, 90,90 and 120 are in junior secondaryl 2and3.

Measures

Two sets of questionnaires were administered: one set for school Heads and the other set to 50 students from each school. The questionnaire: Gender Responsiveness Classroom Questionnaire (for school Heads) and Gender Responsiveness Classroom Questionnaire (for students) were adapted some items from Gender Responsive Classroom Pedagogy.

The one for school heads has three main sections: Section A contains variables like Name of school, Type of school, No of teachers [male and female], No of teachers and school heads who have attended Gender Sensitization Workshop. Section B contain items that measures Gender responsiveness in the class/school management structure of students: items like numbers of boys and girls who are prefects, class captains, heads of club; and who cleans the board and sweeps the classes [boys, girls or both sexes]. Section C contains 10 items on school sitting arrangement, school records, use of tools and materials, handling of disciplinary issues ete the scores in this section I are grouped into 2 levels:0-4 indicates a Gender Responsive school/ classroom while 5-10 indicates a Non

Gender Responsive School/Classroom. The second instrument has 2 sections: Section A has demographic variables (gender, class and age) Section B has items measuring gender responsiveness. 0-5 score indicates Gender Responsive Classroom while 6-20 indicates Non Gender Responsive School/classroom

### Procedure

The schools who participated in the study indicated willingness to take part and granted consent for their students to participate. The students who participated were randomly selected from the three junior secondary school classes [JS1-3].

### Results

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the students' management structure of participating schools

Variable of participation School prefects Heads of Clubs Cleaning Board Sweeping Classroom

Boys Frequency Boys Frequency Students Frequency Students Frequency

< 6

>6

>10 1 School

1 School

1School < 6

> 6 4

2 Boys alone

Girls Alone

Both Boys/Girls 2 Schools

Nil



4 Boys Alone

Girls Alone

Both Boys/Girls Nil

2 Schools

4 Schools

Girls Frequency Girls Frequency

< 6

>6

>10 2 School

4 School

Nil < 6

> 6 6 Schools

2 Schools

The responses were grouped into: less than six[<6] greater than six (> 6) and above ten (>10).The results in Table 2 indicate that 2 schools have girls less than six as prefects and 4 schools have above six girls as prefects while 5 schools have boys above six as prefects and only 1 has less than 6 boys as prefects. This shows that boys are more prefect than girls. Also less than 10 girls are captains in four schools with only two schools indicating more than 10 girls as captains. In all the six schools less than six girls are heads of clubs while boys in four schools are less than six and above six in two schools. **5 Both boys and girls** clean the board and sweep in four schools, girls sweep alone in two schools and equally boys alone clean the board in 2 schools.

Table 3: Gender Responsiveness Classroom Category of the Schools

Levels F %

Gender responsive School 0-4 0.00 0.00

## Non Gender Responsive School 5 – 10 6 100

The result indicated that all the schools sampled scored above 6 which means they are not Gender responsive in the activities in the school.

Table 4: Students Perception of the Gender Responsiveness of the Classrooms

The result in the table shows that 87% of the students perceive their school as not GENDER RESPONSIVE [NGR] while 13% perceive their school as GENDER RESPONSIVE[GR]. This margin is significant and indicates the six schools as not gender responsive

Table 5: Gender Responsive and Non Gender Responsive 8 on the Basis of Gender

Variable Gender Responsive Non Gender Responsive

Gender Male 16 139 155

Female 23 122 145

39 261 300

This result shows that 16 and 23 males and females respectively perceived their school as gender responsive while 139 and 122 boys and girls perceived their school as not Gender Responsive

## Discussion

The findings of this study is quite revealing on the gender responsive of the sampled schools. In the class structure though girls are prefects, monitors, heads of clubs yet boys are more in number than girls in leadership. This is a reflection of the gender disparity in the society where men assume more leadership position than girls, The 'real leaders' in schools are 5 boys and girls are made assistants. The study also shows a little departure

from traditional stereotype: where girls sweep and boys clean the boards except in two schools where this stereotype still exist. <sup>11</sup> The overall result of the study from both students and school heads show that there is still gender disparities and inequalities in the school management structure, class structure, use of materials/ resources/, in textbooks/ pictorial and textual images presented <sup>9</sup> of males and females, in the division of tasks and responsibilities,

The findings is consistent that of Jung and Chung(2006) that male students are likely to occupy teacher-student interaction, while female students are likely to remain as passive respondents, compared with male students; teachers use instructional language and teaching-learning materials that strengthen traditional gender role consciousness of students during lessons; the distribution of curriculum and school facilities by schools and teachers seemed to reinforce the existing gender segregation and gender differences in subjects that already show differential tendencies in achievement and participation for male and female students. The plausible explanation for the maintenance of this traditional stereotype maybe because school heads, teacher, parents and the students have not been trained on gender responsive classroom.

In some states in Nigeria gender disparity in school records has been corrected, names of <sup>5</sup> boys and girls are not separated nor written with different ink. There is therefore the urgent need for gender sensitization of school heads in Delta state on the need to mainstream gender into the school system. The researchers in their interaction with the students found that boys actually use more play space than girls, answer more questions than girls <sup>8</sup> in the classroom and see themselves as superior to girls. There is therefore the need for relevant bodies to work towards not just gender imbalance in enrolment and completion of school but in the pedagogy and structure of the school. <sup>4</sup> Training for teachers who are the subjects of gender equality education is essential in order to actualize gender equality education more effectively at school sites. <sup>12</sup> It is therefore

recommended that education ministries and government should undertake gender sensitization of parents, community leaders and members, teachers, girls and boys in order to raise their awareness and understanding of the need to support girls' education; training teachers in the skills for making teaching and learning processes responsive to the specific needs of girls and boys; empowering girls with skills for self-confidence, assertiveness, speaking out, decision making.

1 Empowering boys with skills to de-link from gender oppressive attitudes and practices such as macho-ism, bullying and sexual affronts and to develop the self-confidence needed to accept gender equality positively. ; training the school community in the skills necessary to improve their reproductive health and protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS. ; 1 training the school community to manage sexual maturation issues of both girls and boys with particular emphasis on menstruation management. Training teachers and students in guidance and counselling skills. establishing guidance and counselling desks in order to provide services for the social and psychological development of girls and boys; providing scholarships and support to needy girls and boys to ensure that they do not drop out of school ;providing gender responsive infrastructure including.(Mlana,2006) Gender responsiveness goes beyond having boys and girls in the classroom but ensuring that these boys and girls are not discriminated but given equal opportunities , access to learning materials, positions and play space. There is the need for gender to be mainstreamed into pedagogical activities in the school and classrooms.

#### Future Direction

This study is a baseline study to establish the degree of gender responsiveness in two local Government Areas in Delta State, there is the need for a more robust study in terms of context, content, statistical techniques and geographical coverage. The study is not in depth of all the components of gender responsive classroom for limitation of time and

finance. Therefore the need for more research endeavours in Southern Nigeria though UNICEF has carried out some pilot studies in some Northern Nigeria because of the assumed long educational disadvantage in the region. Southern Nigeria which includes Delta State is assumed to be ahead of the North educationally but this is in the enrolment and completion of education yet there is a still gender disparity <sup>18</sup> between boys and girls in pedagogical activities in the school; the male child is more favoured in the society. There is the need for more robust research drive that will focus closely areas on these gender disparities and classroom responsiveness.. The classroom should be responsive to the needs <sup>6</sup> of both boys and girls so that all will fulfill their potentials without any hindrance.

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