

Gender, Popularity, Social Competence and Academic Achievement of In-School Adolescents in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship that exists among popularity, social competence and academic achievement of in-school adolescents based on gender. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study, and the study used correlational research design. A total Sample of 400 (SS 11) students were selected from Umuahia Education zone in Nigeria for the study. Mean, Standard deviation and Simple Linear Regression were used in answering the research questions while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in testing the hypotheses stated at 0.05 level of significance. Results of the study showed that relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is low and there is low relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender. There is no significant relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender. Again there is the indication that significant relationship does not exist between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender.

Key words: popularity, social competence, adolescence, gender, academic achievement

1. Introduction

Senior secondary school students are at their adolescence stage which is an intense time of emotional and physical change in a young person's life. It is a time when rapid developmental changes and transitions occur, and adolescents begin to form and shape into young adults. Physical, psychological, intellectual and social changes can all be stressful and difficult to manage during this time. Secondary school students experience dramatic changes, at this stage the physical changes are the most obvious as the body goes through puberty. Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development generally occurring between puberty and legal adulthood (Kali & Ferrer, 2007). These developmental changes affect the rapport of adolescents with their teachers and peers, and are often accompanied by a decrease in academic achievement (Barber & Olsen, 2004) and increase in social interactions (Eccles, 2004). The period of adolescence is most closely associated with the teenage years; although it's physical, social, psychological and cultural expression can begin earlier and end later (Dorn & Biro, 2011).

A thorough understanding of adolescents which one can easily find in the secondary school in every society depends on information from various perspectives, most importantly from the area of psychology, biology, history, sociology, education and anthropology (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Within all of these perspectives, adolescence is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood whose cultural purpose is the preparation of children for adult roles (Larson & Wilson, 2004).

Adolescence is often referred to as a time of storm and stress brought on largely by raging hormones (Lefton & Brannon, 2003) and for some adolescents; it brings a lot of psychological difficulty. Storm and stress do not give the whole picture of adolescence; however, most adolescents (male and female) go through this period of multiple changes without significant psychological difficulty (Santrock, 2004). Although spurts of hormones do affect adolescents' reaction because hormonal changes occur at different point in time for adolescent boys and girls, but non biological factors seem to be especially important in moderating the effect of hormones on adolescents' mood.

This secondary school students which happens to be at the peak of adolescence stage has to do with a rapid increase in individual's height and weight during puberty and teenage age, resulting from the simultaneous release of growth hormones and this is known as adolescent growth spurt (Steinberg, 2008). Male students experience their growth spurt about two years later on the average than females. According to Steinberg (2008), the accelerated growth in different body parts happens at different times, but for all adolescents it has a fairly regular sequence. The first places to grow are the extremities - hands and feet – followed by the arms and legs, then the torso and shoulders. In his view, Tanner (1972) opined that this non-uniform growth is one reason why an adolescent's body may seem to be out of proportion. This change on its own bring confusion as the adolescent

seeks to identify with himself/herself first and then with his/her peers.

1.1 Students' Popularity and Gender

Popularity means having a well-established social place among peers who want to be with one, with whom one has a social standing, with whom one can hang out, and who can provide the acceptable companionship one needs (Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto & McKay, 2006). Being popular is a primary goal of many teenagers and adolescents pursue popularity for social security.

Popularity is of two types, socio-metric popularity and perceived popularity (Cillessen & Rose, 2005). Socio-metric popularity is the act of being well-liked and accepted by others, and socio-metrically popular adolescents display high level of pro-social and cooperative behaviours with low level of aggression. Perceived popularity indicates social dominance, influence and prestige in the peer group. Lease, Kennedy and Axelrod (2002) found perceived popular adolescents to demonstrate both positive and negative qualities. They are characterized as cool, powerful, influential, arrogant, manipulative, controlling and aggressive, often engaged in highly visible and prestigious activities, have expensive clothes and are physically attractive. Perceived popular boys achieve high status on the basis of athletic ability, toughness and social skills and perceived popular girls because of their appearance, social competence and academic success (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2000).

The degree of concern for popularity is now changing and what is expected in order to be popular has changed considerably over time (Cillessen & Rose, 2005). Although conformity to group standard is of prime importance for in-school adolescents' popularity, gender differences can be noted. Girls placed greater importance than boys on conforming, having a good personality, showing pro-social behaviours and having a good appearance in order to be popular. Boys gave greater importance than girls to being "cool", trustworthy, athletic, tough and having money in order to gain acceptance from others (La Fontana & Cillessen, 2002).

Popularity would also appear likely to be linked to concurrent behavioural markers of development, such as social development, higher level of ego development and skill in forming and maintaining relationship (De Bruyn & Cillessen, 2006). Popularity refers to the extent to which adolescents are visible, dominant in their peer group and considered as attractive for affiliation. Dijkstra, Lindenberg, Verhulst, Omel and Veenstra, (2009) maintained that popular adolescents do not have to be well-liked due to their academic achievement and social competence, but these qualities can make an adolescent to be popular.

There are also differences and similarities in gender in adolescents' popularity. In their opinion, De Bruyn and Cillessen (2006) maintained that popular girls do not show high academic achievement and were highly work avoidant, and Kiefer and Ryan (2008) found that boys of minority groups nominated low academic achievers as their most admired and respected peers. Popular boys score average on academic achievement and popular girls more than boys achieve popularity by social success (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2000; Hopmeyer Gorman, Kim & Schimmelbusch, 2002).

Adler and Adler (1998) opined that perceived popular adolescents reflect social competence, in that they seem to have some kind of social control, and for both boys and girls, perceived popularity is accompanied by admiration, leadership, and the ability to manipulate and control the social order of the peer group. Boys tends to know how to use their social skills effectively resulting in interaction that enhances their perceived popularity while girls who are perceived as popular are viewed as pro-social, socially visible and using social-aggressive strategies to establish and maintain popularity.

Cillessen and Mayeux (2004) stated clearly that adolescents' peer popularity has great influence on their social, emotional and academic development. These researchers (Cillessen and Mayeux) maintained that there is a changing appreciation by peers for academic achievement in the period from being a child to being adolescent.

1.2 Students' Social Competence and Gender

Competence describes students' skill or ability in specific field/subject, or being able to do something well; like having sufficient skill in relating and interacting with people. Raven and Stephenson (2001) stated clearly that competency grows through experience and the extent of an individual to learn and adapt. This is evident in interpersonal relationship among adolescents and differences in gender.

Social competence is the foundation upon which expectation for future interaction with others is built, and upon which individuals develop perceptions of their own behaviour. Social competence also reflects having an ability to take another's perspective concerning a situation (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007), learning from past experiences and applying that learning to the changes in social interactions.

Social competence is a set of skills necessary to get along with others and be well-liked. These skills rely on perceptiveness of others feelings, knowledge about social rules and social life and insight in social situations. Social competence develops overtime and the mastery of social skills and interpersonal social interactions emerges at various time points on the developmental stages of a child (infancy – adolescence). Social competence is built on previously learned skills and knowledge (Spence, 2003). However, as developmental changes occur in the structure and quality of interaction as well as in cognitive abilities, these changes affect the complexity of skills and behaviours contributing to socially competent response.

Adolescents' social competence depends upon a number of factors including the individuals' social skills, social awareness and self-confidence (Spence, 2003). Social skill describes the child's knowledge of and ability to use a variety of social behaviours that are appropriate to a given interpersonal situations that are pleasing to others in each situation. The capacity to inhibit negative social behaviours is also a reflection of social skill. Lease, Kennedy and Axelrod (2002) maintained that social awareness focus on how adolescents select social goals; decide on the best response to a situation and enacting the chosen response while self-confidence amounts to increasing evidence demonstrated in social interaction in other to make them socially competent and academically successful. Adolescents' try different social roles as they interact with peers and peers serve as a social stepping stone as adolescents move away from their emotional dependence upon their parents and towards autonomous functioning as an adult.

Gender is seen as set of characteristic qualities that distinguishes between masculinity and femininity, and includes personal attributes, social roles, social customs, activities and behaviour. According to Razzak (2013), senior secondary school students' understanding of gender is quite rigid and stereotyped due to body changes during puberty, interest in dating and forming relationship and the cultural expectation in the society. Boys are marked by common activities whereas girls are marked by intimacy. Adolescent boys are more aggressive than adolescent girls, but girls tend to use aggression that is more social (example, excluding someone from a group and non-verbal communication) than physical in nature (Pellegrini, 2002). Aggression is more common in boys especially physical, but the same cognition that motivate aggressive behaviour appear to operate for both gender and behaving aggressively often leads to peer rejection for both boys and girls (Spence, 2003). Socially competent adolescents are able to consider the perspective of others, can sustain their attention to the task at hand, and are able to remain self-controlled in situations involving conflict.

1.3 Students' Academic Achievement and Gender

Achievement is accomplishing whatever goals you have set for yourself, which is doing what you want to do within the bounds of the law, overcome obstacles and attain a high standard (Nwachukwu, 2004). Achievement requires drive and single mindedness and it's about completing goals one has set for himself or herself.

Academic achievement of students has been of concern to parents, guardian, students and even the wider society. This desire for a high level of achievement puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers, schools, and in general the education system itself. In fact, it appears as if the whole system of education revolves round the academic achievement of students, though various other outcomes are also expected from the system. Academic achievement is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals and it is commonly measured by examination or continuous assessment (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse & Verschueren, 2011), but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important.

A learner can benefit from an academic process based on what the learner exhibit after the learning process. Crow and Crow (1969) defined academic achievement as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning, that is, achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him. This in turn reflects in students' behaviour as he or she interacts with members of the peer group leading to their being socially competent or incompetent. No two individual are exactly alike or the same in overall personality and characteristics, (Tomporowski, Davis, Miller & Naglieri, 2008), and with this assertion, no two individual has equal potentials as far as learning is concerned and this makes the learners to exist in different classes of achievement level. In view of these levels of achievement, it is expected that the learners' ability correspond with the level in terms of performance and subsequent achievement. Marecek, Crawford & Popp (2004) maintained that the social construction of gender in senior secondary schools has shaped the way in which male and female students are believed to perform in various subjects.

In a study conducted in Netherland, Northwestern Europe by Meijs, Cillessen, Scholte, Segers & Spijkerman (2010), using 512, 14 years old and 15 years old adolescents in vocational school and college preparatory school, on gender aspect, maintained that girls scored significantly higher than boys on social intelligence, whereas boys scored significantly higher than girls on perceived popularity. There was no significant gender difference for academic achievement or socio-metric popularity. Social intelligence correlated positively with perceived popularity for both gender, for girls, social intelligence also correlated with socio-metric popularity, but not for boys. Academic achievement did not correlate significantly with social intelligence or the two measures of popularity for either of the gender, and the researchers used two school contexts but the current study will use one school context (public schools) to find out gender and its' relationship among in-school adolescents popularity, social competence and academic achievement.

In another study on peer group pressure as a determinant of adolescents' social adjustment in Nigerian schools, Oni (2010) assessed adolescents' social adjustment in schools using 120 students who were aged between 13 and 19 years. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire with a likert model used to address the purpose which is the influence of peer group pressure on the social adjustment of adolescents. Data

gathered were analyzed using an independent t-test and a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The researcher found among other things that peer group pressure among adolescents is related to their social adjustment and that the gender of the adolescent child affects their social adjustment as well.

Onyilo and Onyilo (2010) conducted a study on academic achievement and self-concept of secondary school students using 400 respondents (200 males and 200 females) randomly selected from Gwagwalada area council of Abuja, to avoid gender bias. The study aims at finding the relationship between the academic achievement and self-concept among male and female students in secondary schools using Adolescent Personal Data Inventory (APDI) to measure self-concept and students' Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) scores in integrated science and social studies to measure their academic achievement. The findings showed that academic achievement and self-concept were gender sensitive, resulting from the fact that male students had greater time to play outside school, while female students were always engaged in domestic work. It is based on the above background that the researchers intend to investigate the relationship that exists among popularity, social competence and academic achievement based on gender. Specifically, the study seeks to: determine the relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement of students based on gender, and ascertain the relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender.

Social constructivist theory as propounded by Vygotsky (1978) states that interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. The theorist stated that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and later on the individual level, that is, between people and then inside the child. A second concept is that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the "Zone of Proximal Development" a level of development attained when children engage in social behaviour. Its basic principles are that cognitive development is limited to a certain range at any given age, and that full cognition development requires social interaction. For Vygotsky (1978), the culture gives the child the cognitive tools needed for development, and social constructivism is essentially a theory about how people socially construct knowledge.

Barnes (2002) proposed psychological theory of achievement motivation which states that one reaches a socially perceived definition of success through hard work and education. In the contemporary view, factors such as gender, social network and geographical location play crucial roles in one's level of achievement. Barnes pointed out that success particularly in academics is best reached when one is achievement oriented to accomplish one's goal especially among peers. According to this theory, there is a relationship between personal characteristics, social background and achievement. These personal characteristics are directly linked with one's home background and people with whom one interacts, that is, the numerous environmental factors in relation to social group. A person with a strong need for achievement tends to exhibit such characteristics as cooperation, altruism and pro-social behaviour.

Secondary school students spend most of their time in school, classes and extra-curricular activities, and they create a small world within this environment in which they seek answers to many of the conflicts that mark this period. These students are faced with the challenges of how to develop and use their social skills effectively and at the same time face their learning activities in school and perform well. The various peer groups to which senior secondary school students belong are formed and function in and around the school setting. Senior secondary school students mostly, do not view learning (the traditional function of the school) as the school primary function; rather they tend to view the social aspects of the school as both more desirable and more important. This also prompted the researchers to find out how these variables, gender, popularity, social competence and academic achievement relate among themselves within the secondary school environment.

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study

1. What is the relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender?
2. What is the relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender?

The null hypotheses are tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H_{01} Based on gender no significant relationship exist between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement.

H_{02} The relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender is not significant.

2. Research Method

The study used correlational research design. A correlational study investigates mutual relationships as it exists between two or more variables and the degree of the relationship that exists between the variables (Nworgu, 2006). The use of this research design is considered appropriate because it will help to establish the relationship

between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender, as well as the relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender.

2.1 Area of the Study

This study was carried out in Abia state, which is located in the southeast of Nigeria. The Education Zone is made up of four local government areas with fifty three (53) public senior secondary schools and the choice of Umuahia Education Zone in Nigeria for this study is necessary because adolescent boys and girls view social aspect of the school as most important and desirable than the primary goal of going to school which is learning.

2.2 Population of the Study

The population for the study consists of all the SS 11 students in public senior secondary schools in Umuahia education zone of Abia State. The total population is 4,032 from the four local government areas in the zone. The choice of this population is to get adolescents that have spent substantial part of their time in the school and are exposed to a stable peer group.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample for the study comprised of 400 SS2 students from the senior secondary schools in Umuahia education zone, and this amounts to 10% of the entire population. Stratified proportionate sampling technique was used to draw 10% from each of the local government areas that make up the zone. With this stratified technique, 402 samples are drawn but were approximated to 400 samples.

2.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument is in three parts; part A contains the personal data of the respondents including age, gender and class in school. Part B is the SCAQ which was adapted from Tromsø social intelligence scale (Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl, 2001) and modified to Social Competence Assessment Questionnaire (SCAQ). The 20-item questionnaire was scored on a four point rating scale; ranging from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1) and was used to elicit information about the students' social competence.

Part C is Adolescents' Popularity Rating Scale (APRS) developed by the researchers was also scored on a four point rating scale. The instrument has two clusters and these include; Cluster A: socio-metric popularity consisting of 10 item statements and Cluster B: perceived popularity consisting of 10 item statements. The result obtained by the respondents at the end of the session was used as a measure of their academic achievement, because there is usually a unified exam for SS 11 students in Umuahia Education zone.

2.5 Method of Data Collection

The researchers administered the instruments with the aid of two research assistants so as to ensure that the entire questionnaire administered and completed were collected on the spot. The respondents were given instruction on how to answer the questions on the questionnaire immediately after its distribution. Also the researcher solicited for the assistance of the principals in ensuring that the end of session result of the sampled students was released in all the sampled schools.

2.6 Method of Data Analysis

Mean, Standard deviation and Simple Linear Regression Analysis were used to answer research questions while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the research hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Regression Analysis Table showing relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender

Variables	Gender	\bar{X}	SD	N	r	R ²
Socio-metric popularity	Female	2.67	.36	228	.204	.042
	Male	2.59	.29	172		
Perceived popularity	Female	2.78	.35	228		
	Male	2.82	.36	172		
Academic achievement	Female	56.90	13.87	228		
	Male	54.03	14.33	172		

The result in Table 1 above shows mean and standard deviation score of 2.67 and 0.36 for female socio-metric popularity, and mean and standard deviation score of 2.59 and 0.29 for male socio-metric popularity. The table also shows mean and standard deviation score of 2.78 and 0.35 for female perceived popularity, and mean and standard deviation score of 2.82 and 0.35 for male perceived popularity. The table also revealed mean and standard deviation score of 56.90 and 13.84 for female academic achievement, and mean and standard deviation score of 54.03 and 14.33 for male academic achievement respectively. From table 1, it shows that the relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is low, with a regression value of .204. Also the coefficient of determination R² from the above table is .042, and

this revealed that 4.2% of relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity accounts for academic achievement based on gender.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Table showing relationship between senior secondary school students' Social Competence and Academic Achievement based on gender

Variables	Gender	X	SD	N	r	R ²
Social competence	Female	2.76	.24	228	.030	.001
	Male	2.80	.27	172		
Academic achievement	Female	56.90	14.87	228		
	Male	54.03	14.33	172		

The result in Table 2 above shows mean and standard deviation score of 2.76 and 0.24 for female social competence, and mean and standard deviation of 2.80 and 0.27 for male social competence respectively. The table shows mean and standard deviation score of 56.90 and 14.87 for female academic achievement, and mean and standard deviation score of 54.03 and 14.33 for male academic achievement respectively. The above table also revealed that the relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender is low, with a regression value of .030. The coefficient of determination R² from the above table is 0.001, and this revealed that 0.1% of senior secondary school students' social competence in relation to gender accounts for academic achievement.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Table showing relationship between senior secondary school students' Popularity and Academic Achievement based on Gender

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.(2-tailed)	Probability level	Decision
1	Regression	1384.752	2	346.188	1.715	.149	0.05	N. S
	Residual	33718.407	396	201.907				
	Total	35103.159	398					

The result in Table 3 above shows that the significant levels for two-tailed test .149 is greater than the probability level (0.05), hence the null hypothesis is being upheld. This goes to show that the relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is not significant.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Table showing relationship between senior secondary school students' Social Competence and Academic Achievement based on Gender

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.(2-tailed)	Probability level	Decision
1	Regression	32.598	2	16.299	.079	.924	0.05	N S
	Residual	35070.561	396	207.518				
	Total	35103.159	398					

The result in Table 4 above indicates that the significant level for two-tailed test .924 is greater than the probability level (0.05), hence the stated null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender.

The result of this study showed that the relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is low. Both boys and girls have low regression value of 0.204 from the analysis. This is in line with De Bruyn and Cillessen (2006) findings that popular girls and boys do not show high academic achievement. This finding is also in line with Onyilo and Onyilo (2010) assertion that academic achievement and self-concept were gender sensitive, resulting from the fact that male students had greater time to play outside school and female students always engage in domestic work.

Analysis of variance shows that gender has no significant relationship with secondary school students' popularity in relation to academic achievement. This result is in agreement with Mejis, Cillessen, Scholte, Segers and Spijkerman (2010) findings that there was no significant gender difference for academic achievement or popularity, and their study revealed that academic achievement did not correlate significantly with the two measures of popularity for either of the gender.

The outcome of this study indicated that the relationship between secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender is low, and this is for both male and female adolescents. This is at variance with Chen, Rubin and Li (1997) findings that academic achievement predicated children's social competence for boys and girls.

Result from the analysis of variance shows that there is no significant relationship between adolescents' social competence and academic achievement based on gender. This result is in agreement with Mejis, Cillessen, Scholte, Segers and Spijkerman (2010) findings that academic achievement did not correlate significantly with social intelligence with either of the gender.

3.2 Summary of Major Findings

1. The relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is low.
2. Gender has low difference in relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement.
3. The relationship between senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement based on gender is not significant.
4. There is no significant relationship between adolescents' social competence and academic achievement based on gender.

4. Conclusion

Gender has low relationship with senior secondary school students' popularity and academic achievement and there is low relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender. Significant relationship does not exist between senior secondary school student's popularity and academic achievement based on gender. There is no significant relationship between senior secondary school students' social competence and academic achievement based on gender

Male and female students should be given equal opportunity to participate in social interaction as well as academic exercises and parents should foster positive social interaction in their children at an early stage of life.

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