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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED EDUCATION

Volume 6 1999 NUMBER 1

## ARTICLES

|                                                                                                                       | PAGE    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| A Survey of the Physics Enrolment Patterns in Senior Secondary Schools in Kwara State                                 | 1-10    |
| <i>E. O. Omosowo</i>                                                                                                  |         |
| The Effect of Audio Tape Utilization on Yoruba Students' Achievement in the Pronunciation of Selected French Phonemes | 11-17   |
| <i>A. O. Abolade</i>                                                                                                  |         |
| Organisation and Administration of Teaching Practice                                                                  | 18-29   |
| <i>A. Okellran and G.S. Oni</i>                                                                                       |         |
| Distance Higher Education in Nigeria Management and And Organisational Problems                                       | 30-41   |
| <i>E. A. Bamisaiye</i>                                                                                                |         |
| Effective Teaching of Mathematics and Computer Education in the Primary and Secondary Schools                         | 42-53   |
| <i>A. Abimbade</i>                                                                                                    |         |
| A Brief Preview of the Secondary Schools Social Studies Curriculum in Nigeria                                         | 54-62   |
| <i>A. A. Jakayinfa</i>                                                                                                |         |
| Pragmatism: A Virtile Philosophy of Adult Education for National Development in Nigeria                               | 63-71   |
| <i>S. N. Osoji</i>                                                                                                    |         |
| Patterns of Teacher's Instructional Techniques in Social Studies                                                      | 72-81   |
| <i>J. O. Ajiboye and O. M. Ogunbiyi</i>                                                                               |         |
| The Relationship Between Gender Behavioural Flexibility and Field of Specialization Among University Women in Nigeria | 82-88   |
| <i>O. Mowaiye-fagbemi</i>                                                                                             |         |
| Effective Leadership Style: A Vital Ingredient for Promoting Effectiveness in Education                               | 89-105  |
| <i>A. N. Olorie</i>                                                                                                   |         |
| Computers in Modern Society                                                                                           | 106-117 |
| <i>O. K. Beyinbade</i>                                                                                                |         |

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER BEHAVIOURAL FLEXIBILITY  
AND FIELD OF SPECIALIZATION AMONG UNIVERSITY WOMEN IN  
NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Personality traits and characteristics are biological as well as environmental. Gender is a universal dichotomy in any given culture. Gender behaviour traits are however believed to produce inhibitions, especially for females, which may lead to inhibitions in achievement and success situations. Most importantly, they inhibit females from subjects, careers and specializations which have been stereotypically ascribed to males. However, where there are gender behavioural flexibility traits, there may be no inhibitions as to choice of a career, which may be perceived as a male domain. This could be true especially for females who are of high intellectual promise and from literate backgrounds. This was the reason for this study on university women in Nigeria aimed at finding out the level of stereotypic gender learning they may have and if this relates to the field the women are in. The study showed that more of the women were feminine in orientation and that there was no significant difference in orientation among those in the science-based specializations and those in the humanities. The study recommended that, for a state of flux to be in gender stereotype, the foundation should be laid early during the foundational years for not only females but males for societal balancing.

INTRODUCTION

Most societies in the under-developed and developing world still subscribed to the stereotype in profession for women. However, as a result of factors within them or in their

background, some women do not tow the stereotype and may feel uncomfortable about it. Such women may be in fields of specialization that are atypical. In an earlier survey in Nigeria's higher technical institutions, a

death of female lecturers was recorded (Mowaie, 1995a). In another study, there was a report on the death of female lecturers in Nigerian Universities (Mowaie, 1995b). It would therefore seem that in Nigeria, higher level teaching has been ascribed to men. The present study is a step further on the researcher's past studies. Using the sex role orientation earlier developed (Mowaie, 1995b), the present study was aimed at finding out if the few women in the universities in Nigeria are gender behaviourally flexible, and if those found to be so are more in the science-based fields.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Tangri (1972) investigated the personality characteristics of role innovative college women. He classified the women as role innovators on the basis of their occupational choice in fields hitherto considered inappropriate for the females, for example, fields in which fewer than 30% of those employed were women. It was found that self-descriptions of role-innovative college women tended to be characterised by responses scaled as unconventional, intellectual, not too successful and away from the "feminine" position. The profile also emphasized autonomy, self reliance, and the assumption of responsibility for others.

Featherston (1988) interviewed seven principals from

public schools in Washington to find out what aided their rise. Professionally, she revealed that the years of experience in education for the women ranged from eleven to thirty-one. She observed also that women tend to have lengthier careers than males before getting the post. The female principals were said to be risk takers in their career, and seemed confident and competent, but also aware that some doubted it.

Skordas observed that while the school teaching profession in the United States of America is an occupation dominated by women, the administrative positions such as principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent of school districts are male dominated. Skordas therefore attempted to find out what influence fathers have on the few women in educational administrative leadership positions. He also researched into the middle childhood, adolescence and early adulthood of the women. The following findings were arrived at:

- (1) Fathers were encouraging, supportive and accepting of their daughters' decisions and life goals.
  - (2) They were confident and academically successful students.
  - (3) Eight of the ten women were first born.
  - (4) The women were career and goal oriented.
- Holt (1979) made the

- observation that women were under-represented in many sectors of the American society. She went on to observe, however, that there were some women in positions of authority, and that these are atypical, by the mere fact that not many women have such positions. Holt therefore wanted to discern the life factor of the female leaders which had contributed to their individual placement. A descriptive case study of twelve female elementary principals from five districts in Northern California, in the United States of America, was conducted. The study according to Holt was affected by the following factors amongst others:
- (1) those willing to participate
  - (2) those willing to be interviewed
  - (3) those not allowed to be interviewed
- Observational notes, personal data, interview tapes, were transcribed and analysed for content to determine commonalities of the respondents. The following conclusions were drawn:
- (1) The female principals had to improve their capability in a position of authority associated with men.
  - (2) An ethnic female (one who is not a white American) in the position of principal had the additional burden of proving that an ethnic was able to do the job. Factors which aided the

females in acquiring high status positions included:-

- (i) a willingness to take risk.
- (ii) goal orientation and self direction, traits which cannot be regarded as feminine.

Andrusikiv (1978) tried to look at sex role attitudes of women (and men) who were higher education administrators. The administrators were in top level positions - Presidents, Vice-presidents, Provosts, Academic Deans, Deans of Schools and Deans of Faculties. There were in all, ninety-eight women and eighty-six men as participants. Percentages, chi-square and the Spearman rank order correlation were used for the analysis of data. The findings revealed that women and men in the study were non-traditional in their attitudes toward sex characteristic and sex role images, the characteristics that may have aided the rise of the women.

Bachtold and Werner (1971) studied three generations of women psychologists and found that the women's responses to Cattell's 16 (sixteen) personality factor Questionnaire indicated that they were significantly more aloof, flexible, adventuresome, inner-directed, confident, radical and self-sufficient than non-professional women.

Helson (1971) (cited in Skordas, 1988) compared the personality characteristics of women mathematicians rated by

other mathematicians as creative with a group of women mathematicians not so rated, and with a group of creative men mathematicians. The scores of the creative women, it was revealed, did not differ significantly from those of the other two groups on measures of cognitive ability. However in comparison to creative men, creative women mathematicians did manifest greater:

1. rebellions, independence, introversion and rejection of outside influence.
2. lack of construction in general attitude and mathematical work.

The creative men were said to have manifested higher dominance, sociability, social presence, and self acceptance than their female colleagues.

Furthermore, women athletes and PHD scientists - are said to be more often masculine or androgynous than being feminine or undifferentiated, while masculine and androgynous women are more dominant than others (Klein and Wilerman 1979, Myers and Lips, 1978).

For the purpose of this study, androgynous women are those who are gender flexible in behaviour as regards sex role orientation while the feminine women are those stereotypically feminine.

#### METHODS

The population for the study consisted of female

lecturers in Nigerian universities. The stratified as well as the purposive sampling procedure was used to select the final sample of 119 women. Women from seventeen universities finally participated. This was in an attempt to see that the final sample is a good description of the total population coupled with the paucity of female lecturers in some of the universities. The instrument used to determine the level of gender behavioural flexibility was the Sex Role Orientation Instrument of the researcher (Mowaiye, 1995b), while a questionnaire was given to the women to indicate their field of specialization. For the purpose of data analysis, analysis of variance was used. The research question that guided the researcher was:

Is there any difference in the Sex Role Orientation of females in the science disciplines as compared to those in the arts disciplines?

#### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the Sex Role Orientation of females in the arts and science disciplines.

To answer the research question and the subsequent hypothesis, the analysis of variance was used. Table 1 is the result.

As observed from Table 1 there is no significant relationship between sex role orientation and the area of specialization among

the lecturers. Thus the generated hypothesis is accepted. To find out if there is any significant difference in the frequency distribution contained for the two groups of subjects in science and arts, the chi-square analysis was applied.

Table 2 is a summary of the frequency distribution.

The obtained chi-square value of 1.37, which is less than the table value of 3.8 with 1 df, shows that the difference between the frequency distribution of androgynous and feminine oriented female lecturers in the arts and science disciplines is not significant.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study do not reveal a significant relationship between sex role orientation and the lecturers area of specialization. This could be because as shown in the literature review, most highly professional women would have had to cross the hurdle of gender inhibitions to make them gender aschematic in

some situations. A further analysis equally revealed no significant difference in the frequency distribution obtained for the two groups of women under study, although the results revealed that more of the women tended to be gender flexible in behaviour and that there were more feminine oriented females in the arts specialization, a field regarded as feminine than the androgynous individuals, 64% of the androgynous group were also in the sciences, while 53% of the feminine group were in the sciences.

There is no doubt that most studies as supported by this study would reveal a high proportion of androgynous females in the high echelons of profession in a traditional society like Nigeria, and thus for the rapid progress of society, there is a need to put in place societal orientations that would lead to the flux of traditional inhibitions for women and would make for gender behavioural flexibility from childhood for the girl child.

Table 1: ANOVA for the Interaction of Sex Role Orientation and Academic Specialization among Female Lecturers

| Source  | DF  | SS       | MS       | F-Value | F-F    |
|---------|-----|----------|----------|---------|--------|
| SR      | 1   | 24496.96 | 24496.96 | 152.68  | 0.0001 |
| SP      | 1   | 46.197   | 46.197   | 0.29    | 0.5926 |
| SR & SP | 1   | 63.68    | 63.68    | 0.40    | 0.5299 |
| Error   | 115 | 18451.80 | 160.45   |         |        |
| Total   | 118 | 43058.64 |          |         |        |

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Arts and Science Lecturers According to their Sex Role Orientation

| Group | Arts | %    | Science | %    | Total |
|-------|------|------|---------|------|-------|
| A     | 20   | (36) | 35      | (64) | 55    |
| B     | 30   | (37) | 34      | (53) | 64    |
| Total | 50   |      | 69      |      | 119   |

A - Androgynous group, i.e gender flexible in behaviour  
 F - Feminine group

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