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Correlation between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest

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Abstract

This study investigated correlation between classroom social environment and secondary school students' interest in Government subject in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu state. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study was 1069 Senior Secondary 2 (SS2) students offering Government in 60 public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone. The sample consists of 285 students drawn using multi-stage sampling technique. Government Classroom Social Environment Scale (GCSES) and Government Academic Interest Scale (GAIS) were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated by three experts from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to ascertain the internal consistency reliability of the instruments. Reliability coefficients of 0.80, and 0.90 were obtained for the GCSES and GAIS, respectively. Pearson product moment correlation, multiple regression analysis, and Hayes Process Macro for SPSS were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed among others that classroom social environment had a very strong, positive and significant relationship with students' academic interest in Government, and that the relationship between classroom environment and students' academic interest in Government subject were not moderated by gender. The study recommended, among others, that teachers should try to maintain conducive, friendly, and cooperative atmosphere in the classroom. Such environment encourages cooperation among the student and helps a lot in boosting students' academic interest in Government.

Introduction

The purpose of educational system is realized through various subjects or courses that are taught at different levels of the educational system. One of the subjects is Government. Government is a subject that is studied in secondary schools at senior level and other institutions of higher learning (such as colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities) through which the students are taught the mechanism by which people are governed in a state (Ezeadi & Asiegbu, 2000). The study of Government as a subject in schools involves the study of political institutions in the state, ideas, values and doctrines about politics and the views of political thinkers on what constitute the welfare of the people. Government as a school subject is very significant. According to the National Senior

Secondary School Curriculum on Government (NERDC, 2007), the focus of government as a field of study is to help the students understand the agencies of state (country) and the way a state is governed. A good knowledge of the agencies of state and the way a state is governed is beneficial to the students and the society at large in various ways. The study of government enhances students' understanding of various political concepts such as state, government, power, legitimacy, sovereignty, political obligation, and the relationship between the individual and the government. Good understanding of these concepts and many others will enable the students get the relevant knowledge and functional skills that will enable them to participate very well in the government of their country.

Among the major objectives of Government subject in secondary schools is to equip the students with citizenship skills that will enable them to become active participants in the democratic process of the nation and their local environments (NERDC, 2007). This objective of making the students active participants in the democratic process of the nation has not been properly realized in Nigeria. One of the basic problems facing Nigerian as a nation nowadays is non-participation of the people in issues that affect them (Nwankwo, 2003). Even though democracy is said to be "government of the people and by the people" many Nigerian citizens are unconcerned about political matters even the ones that affect them. The interest of the students in learning a subject is one of the factors which determine how well the objectives of the study will be realized. According to Rosfiani et al. (2019), interest in learning is a source of intrinsic motivation that encourages students.

Interest is a kind of feeling which a person develops on a task or activity that causes them to give much of their attention to that task. Jimoh (2010) defines interest as a persisting tendency to pay attention and enjoy some activities. Interest which students develops in a subject or any learning exercise is usually known as academic interest. Lamare, and Myrthong (2020) define academic interest as the interest which students develops in school or school life. Academic interest is usually expressed by having a stable positive attitudes towards subjects in school, which may result to a deep engagement in learning and subsequent high performance in the subject (Wu et al., 2019). Among the factors that influence students' academic interest is learning environment (Lamare, & Myrthong, 2020). Learning environment is the physical and social location in which learning takes place. It is the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Every learning environment, including a classroom is made up of different components which include the physical and human components (Malik & Rizvi, 2018). While the physical component of a classroom refers to the physical surroundings and other facilities available in the school for learners such as black board, furniture, lightings, etc., the human component comprises of individuals i.e., teachers and students in the classroom and the nature of interaction between the teachers and students and students' interaction with one another (Malik & Rizvi, 2018). This human component is also known as the classroom social environment (Patrick & Ryan, 2003; Stewart, 2013; Malik & Rizvi, 2018).

Classroom social environment is the relationship between teacher and the students, the relationship among the student, and mutual support that is derivable from such relationship. It has also been defined as the relationship among the students and between the students and the staff of the school (Schools for Health in Europe Network Foundation, n.d.). Most research distinguishes between negative and positive classroom social environments.

Classrooms with a positive social environment are characterized as having high levels of teacher support and where students and teachers experience a sense of emotional connection, respect, and enjoyment (Pianta et al., 2008). Classrooms with a negative social environment are characterized as having teachers provide students with minimal support, and teachers and students regularly disregard and disrespect one another (Reyes et al., 2012).

Three facets have been specifically delineated in the literature as important in evaluating the quality of the classroom social environment. These are: student perceptions of teacher emotional and academic support, teacher promotion of social interaction, and teacher promotion of mutual respect (Patrick et al., 2007; Stewart, 2013). Teacher emotional support refers to students' perception that the teacher cares about them and likes them as a person, whereas teacher academic support refers to students' perception that the teacher cares about how much they learn and wants to help him or her learn (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). When students perceive teachers as highly supportive and have positive, high quality relationships with their teachers, they are more likely to be engaged in school and do better academically (McNeely & Falci, 2004).

The second component is teacher promotion of social interaction. This refers to the extent that students perceive teachers as encouraging students to interact with one another during academic activities (Patrick & Ryan, 2003). Social interaction may include classmates sharing ideas with each other during whole class lessons, working together in small-group activities, or informal help-seeking and help-giving during individual seatwork. Finally, teacher promotion of mutual respect refers to the extent to which students perceive teachers as encouraging respect among classmates (Patrick & Ryan, 2003). A focus on mutual respect should help create an environment where students communicate positively with one another and feel efficacious about their social relationships. Adolescents who perceive they are valued and respected members of the classroom community report higher self-efficacy and mastery, performance-approach, intimacy, and responsibility goals (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). The above three components of classroom social environment, collectively, can boost students' interest in the classroom. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between classroom social environment and secondary school students' interest in Government subject in Nsukka education zone, Enugu state.

Another factor that could influence students' interest in Government is gender. Gender is the physical and/or social condition of being male or female. Don (2014) defined gender as the sum of cultural values, attitudes, roles, practices and characteristics based on sex. In this present study, gender is socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviours and expectations associated with male and female secondary school students. As noted by researchers, the issue of gender reflects almost in every aspect of human endeavor including education (Olufunke & Adebayo, 2014; Charles-Ogan, 2015). Siregar et al. (2023) stated that gender has no significant influence on student interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). On the contrary, a study conducted by Demalata et al. (2024) revealed that female student exhibited stronger interest in Science than male students. Given this varying influence of gender on students' interest in learning, this study adopted gender as a moderating variable. Adopting gender as a moderating variable, this study seeks to investigate the moderating effect of gender on the influence of learning environment on secondary school students' interest in Government in Nsukka Education zone, Enugu state.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom social environment can influence students' academic interest in school subjects including Government and interest in learning is very important in order to achieve the objectives of a subject. One of the objectives of Government as a subject, as stated in the National Senior Secondary School Curriculum on Government, is to enable students to participate actively in the democratic process of both national and their local governments. However, in spite of many years in which Government has been taught in school, the political culture of Nigerian youths, especially, in regard to participation in democratic process of election has been low. People are very reluctant whenever they are called to vote in election or to participate in some other government activities. This shows that the objectives for the introduction of the subject in secondary schools are yet to be achieved. The extent of achievement of the objectives of a subject is determined largely by interest of students in the subjects. Non-achievement of the objectives of Government subject could be attributed to students' lack of interest in the subject and interest in learning could be influenced by classroom social environment. Arising from the foregoing, this study seeks to investigate the correlation between learning environment and secondary school students' interest in Government in Nsukka Education zone, Enugu state.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to investigate the correlation between classroom social environment and secondary school students' interest in Government subject in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu state. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. determine the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government.
2. determine the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government based on gender.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government?
2. What is the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government based on gender?

Hypotheses

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

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government.

H₀₂: Gender has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between classroom social environment and

students' academic interest in Government

Method

The study adopted a correlational research design. A correlational design is a design that is adopted in a study that seeks to establish what relationship exists between two or more variables (Nworgu, 2015). The sample consisted of 285 students drawn out of 1069 Senior Secondary two (SS2) students offering Government in 60 public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu state. The sample was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedure. Government Classroom Social Environment Scale (GCSES) and Government Academic Interest Scale (GAIS) were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated by three experts from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to ascertain the internal consistency reliability of the instruments. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of 0.80, and 0.90 were obtained for the GCSES and GAIS, respectively. Research questions were answered using Pearson product moment correlation, multiple regression analysis, and Hayes Process Macro for SPSS while hypotheses were tested using simple regression statistics, multiple regression analysis and Hayes Process Macro for SPSS.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government

The relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The result in table 1 shows that the coefficient of the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government is .61. This signifies a strong positive relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government.

Table 1. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest in Government

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Pearson	Remark
Academic Interest in Government Subject	285	62.28	6.30	.61**	Positive
Classroom Social Environment	285	54.74	4.85		

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government

A regression analysis was conducted with students' academic interest in Government as the criterion variable and classroom social environment as the predictor. The result of the regression shows that, overall, the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 283) = 170.138$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$. The R which is .613 indicates the correlation coefficient of the relationship between students' academic interest in Government and classroom social environment while the R^2 (i.e. the determination coefficient) which is .375 implies that 38% of students' academic

interest in Government can be predicted from or accounted for by classroom social environment. The F-value of the analysis is 170.138 while the probability value is .001. The decision rule is, if the probability value is less than or equal to the alpha value of .05 reject the null hypothesis which means that there is a significant relationship but if the probability value is greater than the alpha value of .05 do not reject the hypothesis which means that there is no significant relationship. In this test the probability value .001 is less than the alpha value of .05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that there is significant relationship between classroom social environment (the predictor variable) and students' academic interest in Government (the criterion variable). Result in table 2 shows that classroom social environment significantly predicted students' academic interest in Government, $B = .796$, $t = 13.044$, $p < .001$.

Table 2. Relationship between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest in Government

Model	B	SE	Beta	t	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Constant	18.728	3.352		5.587	.000	12.129	25.326
CSE	.796	.061	.613	13.044	.000	.676	.916

Note. CSE= classroom social environment; $R^2 = .38$; $F(3, 283) = 170.138$, $p < .001$; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government based on gender?

Table 3. Correlation between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest in Government Based on Gender

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	62.5428	.3991	156.7124	.0000	61.7572	63.3284
CSE	.7276	.0822	8.8511	.0000	.5658	.8894
Gender	-.6119	.5933	-1.0313	.3033	-1.7797	.5560
Int_1	.1565	.1226	1.2773	.2026	-.0847	.3978

Note. CSE= classroom social environment; Product terms key: Int_1= CSE x Gender; LLCI=lower limit confidence interval; ULCI=upper limit confidence interval

Hayes PROCESS macro (Model 1) was used to examine the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government. The PROCESS macro results indicate that the overall model (that is, combination of variables) significantly predicts students' academic interest in Government [$R^2 = .3814$, $F(3, 281) = 57.7395$, $p < .001$]. This model accounts for 38% of variance in students' academic interest in Government. According to Cohen (1988), this is a large effect. A summary of regression coefficients is presented in Table 3 and indicates that classroom social environment significantly contributed to the model while gender does not. The interaction between classroom social environment and gender was also not significant ($B = .1565$, $SE = .1226$, $p = .2026$), suggesting that the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government is not based

on gender.

Hypothesis 2: Gender has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between learning environment and students' academic interest in Government

A summary of regression coefficients presented in Table 3 indicates that classroom social environment significantly contributed to the model while gender does not. The interaction between classroom social environment and gender was also not significant ($B = .1565$, $SE = .1226$, $p = .2026$), suggesting that the effect of classroom social environment on students' academic interest in Government is not moderated by gender

Discussion

The Relationship between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest in Government Subject

The finding of the study showed that there is a strong positive relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government. This finding also shows that classroom social environment has some influence on the academic development of school children. Classroom social environment is part of the psychosocial aspect of the learning environment. A number of studies have been conducted on the influence of psychosocial environment on students especially on their academic achievement. Some of these studies include Afari (2013). Afari (2013) investigated the effects psychosocial features of the classroom environment (teacher support, involvement and personal relevance) on students' enjoyment of mathematics lessons and academic self-efficacy in Mathematics learning in the United Arab Emirates, using structural equation modeling. Afari's study, among others, revealed that learning environment variables (teacher support and personal relevance) both influenced students' enjoyment of mathematics lessons. Jamaluddin, Kadir, Alias, and Abdullahan (2021) also indicated that teacher and student relationships in teaching and learning sessions are a major contributor to the success of students in their academic achievement. This is because, through the good relationships that exist, the increased motivation and attitude of students towards learning will continue to increase from time to time. It has also been firmly established in literature that experiencing a positive classroom social environment is vital for students' engagement (Patrick et al, 2007), well-being (Wang et al., 2020), and socio-emotional adjustment (Stewart, 2013). Other studies which have shown that there is a significant and positive correlation between educational interest and school environment are Gandhi (2017) and Saputri (2019).

The Relationship between Classroom Social Environment and Students' Academic Interest in Government Subject based on Gender

The finding of the study showed that there the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government is not based on gender. In other words, the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government subject is not moderated by gender. Classroom social environment influences both male and female students' academic interest in Government subject. When the classroom social environment is positive and conducive, both male and female students will develop more

academic interest in Government subject and when it is unfriendly, both male and female students will lose academic interest in Government subject. By implication, this finding shows that both male and female students need friendly, conducive and positive classroom social environment. Influence of good classroom social environment in promoting students' academic interest in Government has no gender bias. This is because both male and female students need good and conducive classroom social environment for learning.

Conclusion

It was concluded among others that classroom social environment has a very strong positive and significant relationship with students' academic interest in Government. This suggests that classroom social environment can boost students' interest in learning Government subject. The cooperation between students and teacher and among the student is a source of motivation to the students and thus sustain their interest in learning. Furthermore, the relationship between classroom social environment and students' academic interest in Government was not moderated by gender. This implies that positive classroom social environment is not gender sensitive, it favourable to both boys and girls. It boosts the interest of both boys and girls in learning.

Recommendations

Teachers should try to maintain conducive, friendly, and cooperative atmosphere in the classroom. The teachers can do this by providing the students adequate support n their academic challenges. The teachers should also encourage the student to cooperate and assist one another as much as they could in their studies. This will help to create environment can help a lot in boosting students' academic interest in Government.

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