Gender as Predictor of Students' Classroom Engagement and Academic Self-efficacy: A Case Study of Oye-Ekiti Secondary School students, Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy are potent drivers of students' academic outcomes. This study investigated the influence of students' gender on their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy in Oye-Ekiti Secondary Schools, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study was informed by the Bandura's social cognitive theory, and adopted quantitative case study design. The study population comprised of all secondary school students in Oye-Ekiti local government area of the State, with sample of 200 students selected through the purposive and convenience sampling techniques. A self-report questionnaire was used for data collection ($\alpha = 0.82$.), which was analysed using frequency counts and percentages, mean and Standard deviation, correlation and independent t-test at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a low level of classroom engagements among students; high academic self-efficacy levels among students; a positive and significant relationship between students' classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy; students' gender does not significantly predict their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy; gender differences exist in students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy. It is therefore recommended that learning environment that fosters students academic engagements and self-efficacy should be provided by governments and education stakeholders; gender preference and disparity should be discouraged in schools, and teaching and learning strategies that boosts students' classroom engagement, and self-efficacy should be employed by teachers and school management.

Keywords: Academic self-efficacy; Classroom engagement; Gender; Students; Secondary School; Nigeria.

Introduction

Secondary education in the Nigerian context is expected to facilitate and enhance students' general academic engagements, self-efficacy and other related learning concerns; which is aimed at ensuring the development of a functional and productive citizenry. Students at this level, who are within their adolescent ages, crave for engagements (social, emotional, cognitive) and self efficacy with the hope of attaining self-actualisation. As such, this study investigates students' classroom engagements, academic self-efficacy with respective of their gender.

Gender has in recent times, become a variable of interest in scholarly concerns, especially in the field of education and psychology. Despite the fact that scholars believe there are gender inequalities, there are many different reasons why they arise and continue across time (Strunc & Murray, 2019). Gender is a stable human characteristics, and the very basis on which humans, irrespective of their diversified backgrounds, can be classified. Igbo et al. (2015) restated that gender consists of behaviour associated with masculinity and feminity, and with how people view their role as male or female. According to Osiesi and Fajobi (2020), gender is a personal variable that causes the notable differences in students' academic achievement and motivational functioning. Stewart et al. (2020) and Whitcomb et al. (2019) have reaffirmed that students' gender plays a great role in determining their classroom engagements, self-efficacy, amongst others.

Students' self-efficacy" refers to a person's belief that they can carry out specific actions required for achieving a particular goal or the belief that they are capable of organizing and carrying out actions towards achieving a specified goal, in this case, the achievement of academic goals (Pavlin-Bernardić et al., 2017; Vidić, 2021). Self-efficacy was described by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016) as a dynamic concept that is continually subject to change. Thus, student self-efficacy can support self-regulated learning and the development of a quality learning environment in the classroom. Similar to this, Fallan and Opstad (2016) identified self-efficacy as a crucial success factor in the learning process. This concept refers to an individual's level of confidence in their ability to complete a task.

According to Bandura (1995), an individual's self-efficacy can be determined by how they interpret their current situation, how others perceive their experiences, whether they believe they have what it takes to achieve their goals, and how they are feeling psychologically and emotionally. Student participation in the classroom is significantly influenced by self-efficacy (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Rudina (2013) asserts that people who have high levels of self-efficacy set more ambitious objectives for themselves and are more prepared to put up the effort necessary to reach those goals. It is crucial to monitor changes in students' self-efficacy and engagement at all educational levels since students with higher levels of self-efficacy will be more motivated to learn (Vidić, 2021).

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Students' connectivity, involvement, and devotion to academic and social activities within the classroom can be defined as classroom engagement (Li & Lerner, 2013; Vidi, 2021). It improves students' cognitive and thriving abilities (Hamsho, 2017). The subject of classroom involvement is vast and includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional elements (Ahamed et al., 2022; Fredricks et al., 2011). Well-engaged students are more eager to study and perform better in class (Ahamed et al., 2022). The level of student participation in class may concretize the kind of interactions that are necessary for real teaching and learning processes (Osiesi & Adeyemo, 2019).

Research on gender relations with respect to students' classroom engagements and self-efficacy in the extant literature abound. For instance, Vidić (2021) conducted a study to ascertain the differences in students' self-efficiency and engagement with respect to gender and age. The sampled students were 659 who were in primary school in Croatia. The results revealed a gender difference in students' engagements. However, there was no difference in their gender with respect to their self efficacy. Using a descriptive correlation research approach, Bangga (2021) looked at the self-efficacy of 134 high school students taking an online physics course in terms of gender and its link to engagements. The findings showed that pupils of both sexes exhibit high levels of self-efficacy. The research also shows a positive correlation between students' self-efficacy and cognitive engagement and a negative correlation between their self-efficacy and emotional involvement. Other research have revealed a favorable connection between students' engagement and self-efficacy (Birgin et al., 2017; Chang, 2015; Kanaparan et al., 2019; Ouweneel et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2017).

Male and female students' self-efficacy levels and strengths were examined by Fallan and Opstad (2016). The study's major goal was to ascertain how gender affected students' self-efficacy and how such interactions played a role. According to the findings, gender has an impact on students' self-efficacy, with female students having lower levels and fewer strengths. Male students had stronger mathematics self-efficacy than female students, according to Pajares' (2005) study. Girls have higher writing self-efficacy than boys, according to Pajares' (2003), Ifdil et al. (2016), and Namaziandost and Cakmak's (2020) investigations.

Sawari and Mansor (2013) and Shkullaku (2013) studies showed male and female students having equal levels of selfefficacies. Huang (2013) meta-analytical study indicates that male students have a higher self-efficacy than females. More so, Rezki (2017) carried out a study that examined students' self-efficacy in EFL classroom. The study adopted the mixed methods design. Results revealed that students' self-efficacy were both at high and moderate levels, and that there was no significant difference across gender. On a similar note, studies have shown that students' gender impacts their classroom engagements. Some show that male students are far less engaged than their female counterparts (Havik & Westergård, 2020; Lam et al., 2012; Lamote et al., 2013; Lietaert et al., 2015). Studies by Lam et al. (2016) found no differences in engagement between male and female students.

In a study published in 2021, Ganiyu evaluated the dimensions of pre-service teachers' classroom participation in Nigerian institutions of education. The study used a descriptive survey approach to its investigation. The 241 study participants were chosen using the purposive and snowballing sample strategies, and a questionnaire was used to gather the study's data. The results showed that there was a considerable gender difference in the levels of student involvement, favouring male students, and that the level of general student engagement was high. Ohamobi and Ezeaku (2016) also looked at the connection between academic achievement and student engagement in Nigeria's Anambra State. 4, 937 secondary school students made up the sample for the survey research design. The results showed that student involvement was very high.

Contrasting findings from studies in the extant literature (et al., 2014; Bangga, 2021; Birgin et al., 2017; Chang, 2015; Fallan & Opstad, 2016; Havik & Westergård, 2020; Ifdil et al., 2016; Kanaparan et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2012; Lamote et al., 2013; Lietaert et al., 2015; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020; Ouweneel et al., 2011; Pajares, 2005; Pajares, 2003; Rezki, 2017; Sawari & Mansor, 2013; Shkullaku, 2013; Wang et al., 2017; Vidić, 2021) raises research concerns. Also, there seems to be no study in the literature that has investigated the influence of students' gender on their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop, that this study investigated gender's influence on secondary school students' classroom engagement and self-efficacy in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. In the classroom, a student's academic success is influenced by their self-directed objectives and general propensity for self-development (Bandura, 2005; Viorel et al, 2015). According to the social cognitive theory, gender, behavior (such as how effectively students participate in class and their level of self-efficacy), and the school environment all play a role in how people behave and how well they operate as a whole. According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy refers to one's perceptions of their own skills to carry out a behavior (classroom engagement) successfully. The gender of students, their participation in the classroom, and their level of self-efficacy may all be related.

Research Questions

- 1. What is the level of classroom engagement among students in Oye-Ekiti secondary schools?
- 2. What is the level of students' academic self-efficacy in Oye-Ekiti secondary schools?
- 3. What relationship exist between students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy?
- 4. To what extent does gender predict students' classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy?
- 5. Do male and female students significantly differ in their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy?

Methodology

Research Design

The quantitative case study research design was utilised in this study. Quantitative case study research design is an empirical investigation into a real-life and contextualised phenomenon, and tries to understand the dynamics present within a single or specified context (Cohen et al., 2007; Yin, 2003).

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample

The target population of this study consists of all secondary school students in Ekiti state, Nigeria. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used in selecting the samples for the study. Oye-Ekiti local government area of Ekiti State was purposively selected as the research site, while schools within the local government, which at the time of data collection gave the researcher and the research assistant permission to use their school for the study were conveniently selected. In all, four of these schools were selected (forty students were selected from each school, and these students were in senior secondary school 1 (SS1) to senior secondary school 3 (SS3). Thus, a total of two hundred (200) students were sampled for the study.

Instruments and Instrumentation

A questionnaire tagged "Students' Classroom Engagement and Academic Self-efficacy Scale (SEASES)" was the instrument used for data collection in the study, and this was designed by the researcher. The questionnaire had three sections, A, B and C. The section A was used to obtain information with regards to students' bio-data such as gender, class, and school. Section B contained 15 items that measured students' classroom engagement, and these where placed on a 4-Likert scale of Great Extent (GE) = 3, Large Extent (LE)= 2, Little Extent (LE)= 1, and No Extent (NE)= 0. Section C had 13 items that measured students' self efficacy, and was placed on a 4-Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A)= 3, Disagree (D)= 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD)= 1.

Instrument Validation and Reliability

The face and content validity of the instrument was determined by two research experts in the field of Educational Tests and Measurement, who were satisfied with the contents of the instruments with regards the study's concerns. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was done using forty three (43) students from a secondary school in Ikole-Ekiti (a different local government area), and these students were not part of the actual study. Test reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach Alpha method, and this yielded an acceptable correlation coefficient of 0.82.

Data Collection Procedure

Informed consent of the sampled respondents for the study was sought and obtained. The researcher and the trained research assistant administered the instrument (SEASES) to the respondents. There was a 100% return rate of the instrument.

Analysis Method

The collected data was organized and cleaned before being entered into SPSS version 23 for analysis. Frequency counts and percentages, mean and standard deviation, correlation, and an independent t-test with a 0.05 significance level were the statistical techniques utilized for the data analysis.

Results

Respondents' Demographics

Variable	Classification	Frequency (Percentage)
Gender	Male	113 (56.5)
	Female	87 (43.5)
	Senior Secondary 1 (SS 1)	102 (51.0)
Class	Senior Secondary 2 (SS 2)	50 (25.0)
	Senior Secondary 3 (SS 3)	48 (24.0)

Table 1: Respondents' Demographics

Table 1 depicts the demographic information of the respondents. As indicated, with regards to their gender, there are more male respondents (113; 56%) than the female (87; 43.5). Also, a large number of the respondents were in Senior Secondary 1 (102; 51.0%).

Research Question 1: What is the level of classroom engagement among students in Oye-Ekiti secondary schools?

Table 2: Level of Students' Classroom Engagement

S/No	Statements	Agree Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Mean	S.D	
1	I feel interested while in class	50 (25.0)	90 (45.0)	1.36	0.48	
2	I feel proud doing class works	66 (33.0)	74 (37.0)	1.50	0.53	
3	I feel excited participating in class	51 (25.5)	89 (44.5)	1.36	0.48	
4	I feel happy while learning in class	50 (25.0)	90 (45.0)	1.36	0.48	
5	I listen very carefully in class	51 (25.5)	89 (44.5)	1.36	0.48	
6	I complete my class assignments in time	51 (25.5)	89 (44.5)	1.36	0.48	
7	I am always involved in class activities	50 (25.0)	90 (45.0)	1.36	0.48	
8	I love to continue working even after class lessons	63 (31.5)	77 (38.5)	1.45	0.50	
9	I actively participate in class discussions	54 (27.0)	86 (43.0)	1.39	0.49	
10	I engage with my classmates and we learn from one another	57 (28.5)	83 (41.5)	1.40	0.49	
11	I ask my classmates about things I don't understand	58 (29.0)	82 (41.0)	1.41	0.49	
12	I seek for information from my class peers and teachers, when I am not sure of things	55 (27.5)	85 (42.5)	1.39	0.49	
13	I interact well with my classmates	55 (27.5)	85 (42.5)	1.39	0.49	
14	I judge the quality of my ideas or work during class	69 (34.5)	71 (35.5)	1.48	0.53	
15	I concentrate fully during class activities	59 (29.5)	81 (40.5)	1.60	0.50	

*Criterion Mean = 1.5.

Table 2 indicates the level of classroom engagement among the respondents. Since a large number of respondents disagreed to the items on their levels of engagements in the classroom, and with the pooled mean below the criterion mean, it can be inferred that the level of classroom engagement of the sampled students in the study is low.

Research Question 2: What is the level of students' academic self-efficacy in Oye-Ekiti secondary schools?

S/N	Statements	Agree	Disagree	Mean	S.D
0		Freq (%)	Freq (%)		
1	I relate with my teachers very well	119 (59.5)	81 (40.5)	4.39	1.27
2	I can adequately express my opinion	111 (55.5)	89 (44.5)	4.05	1.49
3	I can easily make myself happy	125 (62.5)	75 (37.5)	3.58	1.76
4	I can study on my own	142 (71.0)	58 (29.0)	3.97	1.56
5	I can easily control my emotions	138 (69.0)	62 (31.0)	3.38	1.80
6	I can easily make new friends	160 (80.0)	40 (20.0)	4.24	1.34
7	I am able to complete all my homework everyday	117 (58.5)	83 (41.5)	4.33	1.31
8	I academically engage with my classmates during class	140 (70.0) 60 (30.0)		4.24	1.40
9	I pay apt attention during every class	131 (65.5)	69 (34.5)	4.44	1.24
10	I understand most subjects thought in school	125 (62.5)	75 (37.5)	4.14	1.50
11	I do make my parents and loved ones happy as a result of my academic performance	128 (64.0)	72 (36.0)	4.29	1.33
12	I can suppress unpleasant thoughts easily	136 (68.0)	64 (32.0)	3.68	1.67
13	I can succeed in passing my tests and examinations in all subjects	146 (73.0)	54 (27.0)	4.37	1.34
	Pooled Mean (n = 200)				4.09

Table3: Level of Students' Academic Self-efficacy

*Criterion Mean = 2.5

Table 3 indicates the level of students' academic self-efficacy. Since a large number of respondents agreed to the items on their levels of academic self-efficacy, and with the pooled mean (4.09) far above the criterion mean (2.5), it can be inferred that the academic self-efficacy of the students in this study is high.

Research Question 3: What relationship exist between students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy?

Table 4: Correlation Analysis between students' classroom engagement and their self-efficacy

Correlations		Classroom Engagement	Academic Self-efficacy
Classroom Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.237**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
Academic Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.237**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 indicates the relationship between students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy. As revealed in the table, there exists a positive and significant relationship between students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy. This infers that an increase in students' classroom engagement, positively increases their academic self-efficacy.

Research Question 4: To what extent does gender predict students' classroom engagement and self-efficacy?

 Table 5: Regression Analysis of Gender predicting students' classroom engagement and self-efficacy

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R = 0.09 R ² = 0.08 Adjusted R ² = 0.10 Std, Error of the Estimate = 0.40								
ANOVA ^a								
Model	Model Sum of Squares Df Mean Square F Sig.							
Regression	.17	2	.09	.54	.59			
Residual	21.55	197	.16					
Total	21.72	198						

*Sig, at P<0.05

Table 5 depicts the extent to which students' gender predict their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy. The table shows a coefficient of multiple regression (R =0.09, $R^2 = 0.08$, and R^2 adjusted = 0.10). This means that students' gender accounted for 10% of the variance in their classroom engagement and self-efficacy. Thus, the regression ANOVA produced ($F_{(2, 197)} = 0.54$, P >0.05). This implies that students' gender does not significantly predict their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy.

Research Question 5: Do male and female students significantly differ in their classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy?

Table 6: T-test Analysis of the Gender Di	fference in Students' Classroo	om Engagement and Academic Self-efficacy

Gender					_	Т	Sig.	Decision
		Ν	Mean	S. D	Df			
Classroom	Male	113	33.72	7.64	198	17	0.87	Not significant
Engagement	Female	87	34.00	8.55				
Academic Self-	Male	113	94.13	19.98	198	-2.37	0.02*	Significant
efficacy	Female	87	103.75	13.15				

*Significant at p <0.05.

Table 6 indicates the t-test analysis of the gender difference in students' classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy. For students classroom engagement, results of the t-test (t = -.017; p (0.87) > 0.05) indicates a non significant difference between male and female students. Nonetheless, the female students have higher classroom engagement (Mean = 34.00) than the males (Mean = 33.72). In contrast, the t-test results (t = -2.37; p (0.02) < 0.05) shows that there exist a significant difference in the academic self-efficacy among male and female students. This difference is in favour of the female students.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed clearly that the level of classroom engagements of students in the study is low. There is the possibility that this could be as a result of teachers adopting teaching strategies that disallow students' participation/engagement in the learning process. Or could it have been as a result of students' poor attitude towards learning or disinterest in classroom engagement? Future inquiry could ascertain this. This finding contrasts the findings of Ganiyu (2021) study which revealed a high level of students general engagements. The reason for this is likely to be the difference in the sample characteristics, as the later sampled pre-service teachers, as against the secondary school teachers used in this study. Also, the finding does not agree with the findings of Ohamobi and Ezeaku (2016), whose findings revealed a high level of engagements among students. This may be due to the fact that the later used the survey research design and a larger sample size, as against the present study whose sample is smaller and is a case study.

Findings of the study also revealed that the academic self-efficacy of the students in this study is high. This is understandable as the cultural context of the study allows for students' self-dependence and actualisation. From homes, students are trained and taught the life survival skills, and these may have impacted on their self-efficacy levels. This finding fully supports the findings of Bangga (2021) whose study revealed a high level of self-efficacy among students. Findings also revealed that there exists a positive and significant relationship between students' classroom engagement and their academic self-efficacy. A robust classroom engagements of students do improve or enhance their self efficacy levels. Bangga (2021), Birgin et al. (2017), Chang (2015), Kanaparan et al. (2019), Ouweneel et al. (2011), and Wang et al. (2017); whose studies indicated a positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and engagement.

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Findings also showed that students' gender does not significantly predict their classroom engagement and academic selfefficacy. This disagrees with the findings of Fallan and Opstad (2016), that revealed that gender predicts students' self-efficacy. As at the time of this study, the researcher could note review literature that shows how students' gender predict their classroom engagement. More so, the study finding indicates a non significant difference between male and female students in classroom engagement; although, the female students have higher classroom engagement than the males (by the comparism of difference in mean values). This is supported by Rezki (2017) study that showed a non significant difference across gender. This have been corroborated by the findings of et al. (2014), Havik and Westergård (2020), Lam et al. (2012), Lamote et al. (2013), and Lietaert et al. (2015).

The results of this survey also revealed a considerable discrepancy between male and female students' perceptions of their own academic abilities. The female students benefit from this differential. This backs with the conclusions of studies by Fallan and Opstad (2016), Pajares (2003), Ifdil et al. (2016), and Namaziandost and Cakmak (2020) showing girls exhibit stronger writing self-efficacy than boys. The results, however, conflict with those of Huang (2013) and Pajares (2005), whose studies found that male students have higher levels of self-efficacy than female students, as well as Sawari and Mansor (2013) and Shkullaku (2013), whose studies found that both male and female students have comparable levels of self-efficacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the study's findings, there is a connection between students' academic self-efficacy and their participation in the classroom. Although differences exist in favour of female students, gender does not significantly impact students' classroom engagement and academic self-efficacy.

Sequel to these, the study recommends the following:

- 1. Learning environment that fosters students academic engagements and self-efficacy should be provided by governments and education stakeholders;
- 2. Gender preference and disparity should be discouraged in schools;
- 3. Teaching and learning strategies that boosts students classroom engagement, and self-efficacy should be employed by teachers and school management.

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