ROLE OF GENDER COMMUNICATION ON STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC BEHAVIOUR: SURVEY OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MAKADARA SUB-COUNTY NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour in ten public secondary schools in Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi. Objectives were to establish the effects of conversational styles on student’s academic behaviour, to establish the effects of gender communication biases on students’ academic behaviour and to establish the effects of gender communication factors on students’ academic behaviour. The target population of interest for this study was 1200 form four students from the ten public secondary schools in Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample of schools which included boys, girls and mixed gender schools. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the 120 sampled students. End of term three examination results 2013 were analyzed to establish the performance of these students from sampled subjects taught by teachers of opposite gender. Pilot testing was done with questionnaires to test reliability and validity. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to process and analyse data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to run descriptive analysis to produce frequency distribution and percentages. From the findings, the researcher established that gender communication plays a role on students academic performance behaviour. Female students taught by male teachers perfomed better in Chemistry whereas male students taught by female teachers performed better in English. This is supported by Wentzel (2008) who states that a strong teacher-student relationship characterized by caring and high expectations for students’ success maybe promotive of universal benefits such as good performance and positive academic behavior. The findings also established that gender stereotypes still exists in learning institutions where male teachers dominated science subjects while female teacher dominated languages and art subjects. Since this study was done in Makadara Sub-County, it is recommended that a similar study be carried in other counties to elicit a more accurate national perception of enhancing positive student academic behaviour.
Key Words: gender communication, students’ academic behaviour, public secondary schools, Makadara Sub-county, Nairobi

Introduction

According to Griggin (2009), Communication is the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response. Essentially, it is a process of transferring information, thoughts, ideas, data and messages from one entity to another (sender to receiver). Depending on the context of the message, information can be received or interpreted in many different ways. Communication is intermingled with all daily functions and activities with friends, family, co-workers, classmates and others. The world is completely reliant on communication in every aspect of daily life (Griggin, 2009). This opens the door for miscommunication and conflicts to arise. Communication plays an important role in education.

The communication that occurs between teachers and students has an impact on the students’ academic behaviour and the overall educational experience. Students’ academic behaviour can be either positive or negative. Positive academic behaviour includes cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self-control. Whereas negative academic behaviour may include; poor concentration in class, truancy, fighting, abusive conduct, shattering other students’ property, bullying, and poor attendance in school among others. Discipline problems reduce the amount of academic learning time and create unhealthy classroom conditions (Griggin, 2009).

“Academic behaviour” reflects how well an individual performs on various academic-related tasks over a period of time. It is an indicator of motivation, time management and written communication skills” (Payne, 2007). Interpersonal communication is the lifeblood of meaningful relationship in personal, social and professional context. Poor communication can result in students being critical of others and themselves. It can result to withdrawal, depression, anxiety and stress. In learning institutions, effective communication with students’ contributes to positive behaviour and registering good results in examinations. A quality-learning environment is achieved when the classroom or the learning environment displays a high level of support for learning. Gender communication plays a critical role in the dynamic classroom and it is one of the most important variables affecting students’ academic behaviour (Payne, 2007).

Gender communication in the classroom environment is one of the most powerful elements within the learning institutions. It is a major factor affecting students’ development, school engagement and academic motivation. Gender interactions are not only influenced by a number of aspects including gender, but also influence academic outcomes and behaviour. Supportive and positive relationships in the school environment promote a sense of belonging and encourage students to participate cooperatively in the classroom activities (Chen, 2011). Students’ perceptions on their instructor’s credibility have a profound influence on their learning and interactions.
Wood, (2000) in her writing “Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture” explains that gender communication differences begin during childhood. From an early age, males and females are taught different linguistic styles. Communication behaviours that are acceptable for girls may not be acceptable for boys and vice versa. Many times men and women struggle when communicating with the opposite gender. For communication to be effective, it must be understood and interpreted positively. One of the biggest barriers to effective communication is gender. “The first step to overcome the gender communication barriers is to identify male and female communication patterns.” According to (Gray, 2002), gender communication issues go back to when a child is born. The way the male and female babies are dressed in different kinds of colours of clothing communicates the genesis of the individual identity globally. The parents respond differently to male and female infants and people describe the identical behaviour on the part of the infants differently when they are told the infant is a boy or a girl. Girls and boys in their formative years are sent endless socialization messages about how they ought to behave in order to have successful outcomes. The messages differ as functions of the gender of the particular child. One simple example is crying in response to frustration by girls and “acting out” behaviour in response to frustrations by boys (Hann, 2008).

In many African societies, a boy is always encouraged by male adults to reach out to expand his capacity in climbing, building and running. This encouragement in socialization directs the boy’s sight far beyond the immediate family home and the community, and instead is helped to focus into the far worlds. This sets him apart and introduces him as a symbol of strength upon which the family assures him security in all areas such as food, shelter and clothing. The boy child is guided into mobility, power and aggressiveness and can freely exhibit terrors in the playgroups and that will not only be acceptable but also highly appreciated and applauded (Hann, 2008).

On the other hand, a girl child will not only disappoint her parents if she shows some level of aggression but also cause grief to the parent because such aggressive trait is opposed to the norms acceptable in the society; female adults mainly communicate these teachings. Social upbringing, informal trainings and society’s codes of acceptable and unacceptable norms shapes women and men to inculcate themselves a higher level of cultural and social images. Occupations within the accepted norms of the society are mostly viewed as an extension of the sex roles.

The Government of Kenya views education as the vehicle for attaining its national development programmes and realisation of goals for social equity, economic equity, social justice and national development (Eshiwani, 2009). The emphasis in provision of quality secondary school education lies in the fact that it forms a crucial phase between the world of work and the entry into colleges and university education. The much investment by individuals and the government is because of high expectations that people have on the possible impact of education. It is expected that through education, the government can meet the national goals of education that among other things aim at promoting: national unity, national development, Individual
development, self-fulfilment, social equality respect and development of cultural heritage and international consciousness (GOK, 2005).

A number of reports have indicated that the government is spending over a third of its annual budget on education and hence the concern because education is consuming a great part of the country’s annual budget than any other public enterprise with an aim of producing holistic responsible Kenyans. In the recent years, management of some secondary schools has raised concern from both the public and the Ministry of Education leading to appointment of inquiries into causes of student unrest and indiscipline (GOK, 2005). The school management are expected to carry out supervision of teaching and non-teaching staff by coordinating curriculum implementation effectively and smoothly. Cases of poor disciplinary procedures have occurred; sporadic use of excessive force in caning students and in view of numerous complaints, the government banned corporal punishment in all schools. Owing to these indiscipline cases, there has been an outcry when the Kenya national examination council releases examination results, owing to these poor results, the head teachers and teachers have been targets of public censure for students’ academic behaviour. Although Kenyans seem to be pre occupied with performance in national examinations, the correct position would be to focus in evaluation of schools need for a holistic approach that fosters holistic growth of learners.

In Kenya today, the Government and educational institutions have developed recognition of the importance of gender equity and equality in education with strategies and implementations of variety of initiatives. The National plan of action Education for All (2003-2015), the report of the education sector review (GOK 2005), the Ministry of Education strategic plans and service charters, sessional paper No.1 of 2005, and the Kenya education sector support programmes (KESSP) 2005-2010, have all paid attention to gender issues and education. The Kenya National Examination Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Education analysed the 2012 KCSE results as follows: Out of 411,783 students who sat for the KCSE examinations, boys have consistently dominated the top positions. Out of the top 10 positions nationally, boys took seven while girls managed only three, as was announced by the then education minister the late Hon. Mutula Kilonzo. When it came to gender analysis, while 23,224 more girls sat for the 2012 KCSE Examinations as compared to KCSE 2012, the numbers still favoured the boys where they outnumbered the girls by 46,927. Kirinyaga was the only county out of 47 counties that had a higher number of girls sit for the examinations. Mandera County on the other hand had the worst boy – girl ratio. Only 27.3 percent of the candidates in North Eastern were girls. Gender biases occur when people make assumption when interacting.

Tannen, (2001) states in her genderlect theory that communication between man and woman can be like cross-cultural communication prey to a clash of conversational styles. Effective communication regarding behaviour, abilities or preferences of others based upon their gender results in positive interaction. Individuals providing each other with needed resources like information and materials and processing information more efficiently and effectively
characterize it. It also involves providing each other’s with positive feedback in order to improve their productivity and performance. Gender communication poses problems in interactions, may lead to intolerance, resentment, stress, and even decreased workplace productivity. A number of studies have revealed that both men and women exert greater influence when communicating in gender – stereotypical manner, Burgon (2003) for example asserts that, displays of visual dominance increase men’s influence in communication but reduce women’s. The communication that occurs between genders has an impact on the student’s overall performance in academic behaviour and overall educational experience. Poor communication can result in students being critical of others and themselves. It can result to withdrawal, depression, anxiety and poor performance in examinations. In learning institutions, effective communication with students contributes to positive behaviour by registering good results in examinations. A quality-learning environment is achieved when the classroom or the learning environment displays a high level of support for learning. Teacher – student relationship is one of the most powerful elements within the learning environment. It is a major factor affecting students’ development, school engagement and academic motivation. Supportive and positive relationships between teachers and students promote a sense of school belonging and encourages students to participate cooperatively in classroom activities (Chen, 2011).

Makadara Sub-County consists of two zones Buruburu and Viwanda which have their catchment areas differing from each other. Whereas Buruburu zone has most of its students from the middle class families, Viwanda zone has most of the students’ enrolment from the slum dwellers that mainly are very needy cases. Parents from the slums are either not working or are small-scale business men or women. Students in the surrounding may be affected not only by school based factors but also by other external factors about socioeconomic background as well as gender communication factors. Students from poor families are driven into child labour to substitute for their unemployed parents whereas poor performance is a general outcry in many countries including Kenya, evident dismal results in KCSE performance in Makadara Sub-County have been recorded over years. Blames have heatedly been shifted where parents blame teachers while on the other hand teachers blame parents. However, in their argument there has been no proof, which has led to the need to research and identify to help analyse objectively the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour. It is in this context the study focused on establishing the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour in ten public secondary schools in Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi County.

**Statement of the problem**

Gender communication is a vital aspect that cannot be escaped at any point in our lives. The educational goals of education in Kenya is geared towards ensuring that all students acquire life skills and lifelong learning emphasizing on holistic quality education that promotes both cognitive and affective domains. There is a widespread perception that gender communication problems and conflicts are endemic in learning institutions and that communication practices
need to be improved if learning is to function smoothly safely and effectively. During the second
term of the year 2008, nearly 200 secondary schools and other institutions out of a total of 5600
public and private secondary schools and 21 public technical training institutions were involved
in unrests. Out of these, about 180 public and private secondary schools were seriously affected.
There was a reason of concern concerning this problem given the fact that it’s growing in
frequency and gravity of damage could undermine the long term goals of education and
three determinants of students’ academic behaviour in the third world countries as class size,
textbooks, school administration, teacher’s qualifications and teacher student ratio, which he
quantifies as school based factors. (Wilkinson, 2005) in his study found out that classroom
environment which include lack of enough learning facilities, rigid school rules, lack of good
relationship among the teaching staff, prefects and students affect their academic behaviour.
Whereas many studies have been conducted to establish the cause of students’ unrest and
indiscipline in most secondary schools, the role of gender communication has not been
considered as a factor. It is in this context that this study focused on establishing the role of
gender communication on students’ academic behaviour in ten public secondary schools in
Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi.

General Objective

To establish the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour in ten public
secondary schools in Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi

Specific Objective

To establish the effects of gender conversational styles on students’ academic behaviour in
Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi

Literature Review

Genderlect Styles Theory

According to Tannen (2006), genderlect refers to the study of different communication styles of
men and women. How something is received, constructed and understood is every bit as
important as what the speaker intended. According to this theory, “A male and female
conversation is cross-cultural communication”. This explains why men and women often talk
past each other”. The theory states that miscommunication occurs all the time between men and
women because of the different cultures they come from. The effect may be more insidious
however, because the parties usually do not realize that they are in a cross-cultural encounter. At
least when we cross a geographical border, we anticipate the need to overcome a communication
gap. In conversing with members of the opposite sex, Tannen notes our failure to acknowledge
that different conversational styles can get us into big trouble. Most men and women do not grasp that “talking through problems” with each other will only make things worse if their divergent ways of talking are causing the trouble in the first place (Tannen, 2006).

When she compared the conversation styles of boys and girl in second grade, she felt she was looking at the discourse of “two different species.” For example, two girls could sit comfortably face to face and carry on a serious conversation about people they knew. When boys were asked to talk about “something serious”, they were restless, never looked at each other, jumped from topic to topic and talked about games and competition. These stylistic differences showed up in older kids as well. Tannen (2006) notes that “moving from the sixth grade boys to the girls of the same age is like moving to another planet.” There is no evidence that we grow out of these differences as we grow. She describes adult men and women as speaking “different words from different worlds,” and even when they use the same terms, they are tuned to different frequencies”. Tannen’s cross-cultural approach to gender differences departs from much of feminist scholarship that claims that conversations between men and women reflect men’s efforts to dominate women. She assumes that male and female conversational styles are equally valid:

“We try to talk to each other honestly, but it seems at times that we are speaking different languages or at least different genderlects.” Although the word ‘genderlect ‘ is not original with Tannen, the term nicely captures her belief that masculine and feminine styles of discourse are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects rather than as inferior or superior ways of speaking. She realizes that categorizing people and their communication according to gender is offensive to many women and men. None of us likes to be told, “Oh, you are talking just like a woman or a man”. Each of us regards herself or himself as a unique individual. However, at the risk of reinforcing a simplistic reductionism that claims biology is destiny, Tannen insists that there are gender differences in the way we speak. Glass (2012) argues that non-verbal communication is seen as an area where gender differences in communication exists, this includes facial expression, hand and arm movement, posture, position and other movements of the body, legs or feet. In educational context, this theory can be used to explain the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour. According to Tannen, male teachers and female teachers come from different worlds and they use different words even when they use the same terms. That is; teachers teach the same concepts to the students of opposite gender who are tuned to different frequencies, meaning that miscommunication is likely to take place thus affect the students’ academic behaviour either positively or negatively. In the classroom context, boys are likely to be more aggressive thus act actively by asking questions and interacting with their teachers more than girls. The boys will dominate the classroom and therefore make the girls feel insecure and withdrawn thus affecting their behaviour. This is as a result of different cultural backgrounds and social roles that each gender is assigned to as they grow.
Review of empirical studies

Eckes (2000) in his studies reports that women use a pleasant warm voice in conversation but is not characteristic of men conversation. Differences have also been noted with respect to the gestures used while speaking. Men are observed to use straight and sharp movements while women tend to have more fluid movement. He states that men establish status hierarchy to compete, exert control and maintain upper hand in conversation. Robb (2000) emphasized that women also established hierarchies based on friendship, power and accomplishment. According to him women are more emotional than men. They focus on feelings and building relationships while men focus on power and status.

Glass (2012) studies states that men are direct and straight forward in their speech. They use the technique of loudness to emphasize points where as women use pitch and inflection for emphasis. Men tend to interrupt more than women, make direct accusations and statement and ask fewer questions. Dindia (2002) studies on interruptions found that Gray’s writings that men constantly interrupt their partners and offer solutions failed to account for the fact that communication behavior is often interdependent, therefore those who interrupt may have an effect on their partner’s subsequent interrupting behavior. Dindia discovered that both sexes interrupt and that man do not interrupt more than women especially in mixed sex groups.

Coates (2006) wrote about her studies involving gender separated discussion groups. Her observations revealed that women reveal a lot about their private lives in their conversations, stick to one topic for a long time, let all speakers finish their sentences and try to have every one participate. In contrast, men discussed things other than their personal relationships and feelings, their changed topic frequently dominate conversations and establish a hierarchy in communication. Gray (2002) study based on participants report in relationship seminar shows that women use superlatives, metaphors and generalizations in their speech whereas men are more direct and straightforward on their speech. Lippa (2002) academic research on psychological gender differences has shown that while women use communication as a tool to enhance social connections and create relationships, men use language to exert dominance and achieve tangible outcomes. Basow and Rubenfeld (2003) in their studies state that women are overall more expressive, tentative and polite in conversation while men are more assertive and power-hungry. On the other hand, men offer solutions to problems in order to avoid further unnecessary discussions of personal problems.

Wood (2000) in her study states that women use communication as a way to establish and maintain relationships. Women are responsive, supportive, value quality and work towards sustaining communication while men use communication as a means to solve problems, maintain dominance and assertiveness. They are therefore less responsive, their talk being more abstract and less personal. Tannen (2001) Findings at social gatherings show that men engage in solution oriented conversations aimed at a main issue. Women are however said to engage in relationship
oriented conversations that targeted to connect with and relate to other speakers. She described women’s communication style as being more emotional than of men. Women focus on feeling and building relationships while men focus on power and status.

Aries (2008) studies on gender differences in interaction can also be accounted for by the differences in status. Research has shown that aggressiveness and dominance was found to be dependent on status on top of gender and that the differences in communication are sometimes less noticeable in men than in women at the same societal level. Eckes (2000) study on children has shown that there are language differences between boy and girls as early as pre-school. Pre-school Chinese girls are bossy and argumentative, with boys depending on the scenario. Empirical data indicating that the trends of females choosing silence over voice can be found in schools. Sadker and Sadker (2004) in their study in America state that girls participate less in class discussions, ask fewer questions and are less animated when compared to boys. When individuals do not share their opinions, ideas and concerns such absence of voice can have a serious negative implication in organizations. Gilligan (2002) in his research studies has shown that in general women are more social emotional in their interactions with others where as men are more independent and unemotional or attached in conversations. Other research studies argues that women use less powerful speech, they tend to swear less, they speak more politely and use more tag questions and intensifiers (Lackoff, 2008). Women also tend to interrupt less than men do. This is because of their perceived lower status to men. This could be due to societal norms that enforce this gender status hierarchy. Pearson (2005) also found that women often weaken their statements. One explanation of this could be due to their lower self confidence in what they are saying and their fear of being wrong which can be contributed to their perceived inferior status to male manager in the workplace.

Tannen (2001) studies on gender differences in communication done in the workplaces addressed on the biggest source of conflict is their gender differences when coping with stressful situations, stylistic communication differences often cause rift between men and women in the way in which they attempt to influence tactics such as personal appeal, consultation, assertiveness and inspirational appeal. According to (Eagly, 2000) gender differences in communication exists in leadership styles and that men often use a more task-oriented approach while women on average rely on leadership style based on quality of interpersonal relationships. Ortman (2002) studies show that teachers tend to communicate less with boys as a form of behavior control. Teachers usually praise, criticize and correct boys more often than girls. Although teachers usually punish boys for the same misbehavior more severely than girls, girls are more often punished inappropriately when demonstrating behavior which is in teachers’ opinion more characteristic of boys, for example being noisy. Wood (2000), objects to the solutions that Gray prescribes which are a disservice to the women and men who follow them because they are not based on theory supported by empirical research.
Yieke (2003) in his research in Kenyan universities states that 40 per cent of her sample of 200 graffiti dealt with social-economic and academic issues that affected students directly in their lives on the campus. The paper argued that if you wanted to be sensitised and to be informed about the social issues that affected students, then reading graffiti was one way to do so. It concluded that far from being acts of vandalism and mischief, as often perceived, they were useful communication avenues in a bottom-up process and a kind of resistance to the status quo.

Onsongo (2002) in a study done at Kenya’s Export Processing Zone (EPZ) companies in Ruaraka, Athi River and also in Changamwe, found that the workers faced serious violations of their basic human rights and as usual women who form bulk of the semi-skilled workers, bear the brunt of this suffering. Data was collected and drew specifically on those graffiti (writings) found in toilets and other secluded places. Graffiti act as an avenue through which a minority group, most often in an oppressive situation can express its opinions. Such groups are denied other legitimate ways of expressing their opinions on matters that they feel affect them. Faced with such limitations, the use of graffiti on public walls becomes a favoured option. Women at workplace experience many problems and forms of discrimination.

Conversational Styles

Conversation is a social activity: it is a spoken interaction involving at least two or more people. Graddol and Swann (2008) point out that conversation can be regarded as a structured activity that the talk has to be sequenced, effectively opened and brought to a close. To keep a conversation going, participants should follow certain rules such as for example aspects like what one is supposed to say, when it is appropriate to say it, how to continue the current topic or talk on a topic exactly about what is under communication and also how to relate to the turn taking system. From this perspective, conversation is a cooperative endeavour. Conversation can be the establishment and maintenance of relationship between speakers. Through talk, people can express intimacy or show respect, friendliness or hostility.

Rapport Talk versus Report Talk

Tannen (2006), asserts that she listens to men and women talk and is certain that speakers from feminine culture and masculine culture have different linguistic talk where women value rapport talk while men value report talk. The following are different talks that influence communication:

Public speaking versus private speaking

Although gender differences in communication are consistent with stereotypes concerning typical male and female behaviour, the differences have been shown to depend on situational factors, such as whether communication occurs in mixed or same sex groups. Coates (2006) wrote about her studies involving gender separated discussion groups. From her observations,
she noted that women reveal a lot about their private lives in their conversations, stick to one topic for a long time, let all speakers finish their sentences and try to have everyone participate. In contrast, men discuss things other than their personal relationships and feelings; they change topics frequently, dominate conversations and establish a hierarchy in communication. Research findings have revealed that both men and women exhibit greater warmth towards women than towards men. A number of studies have revealed the higher levels of positive social behaviour. Gray (2002) study based on participants reports in relationship seminar shows that women use, superlatives, metaphors and generalizations in their speech whereas men are more direct and straight forward in their speech.

**Asking questions**

According to Tannen (2006) men do not ask for help. Women ask questions to establish a connection with others. When they state their opinions, they often tag them with a question at the end of the sentence (“That was a good movie, don’t you think?”). Tag questions serve to soften the sting of potential disagreement that might drive people apart. They are also invitations to participate in open, friendly dialogue. But to men, they make the speaker seem wishy-washy.

**Communication directness and indirectness**

Tannen (2006) describes how when questioned about why more men were not hired or promoted, male managers used statements about women lacking confidence. One behaviour that may be seen by others as a lack confidence may be the direct way women give orders. Women often used tagged phrases like ‘don’t you think’ following the presentation of an idea, ‘if you don’t mind’ or following a demand like ‘this may be a silly idea’, whereas men tend to be more direct (Case, 2004).

**Connection verses Status**

According to Tannen, (2006) men are concerned mainly with status. They work hard to preserve their independence as they seek for position on a hierarchy of competitive accomplishment for example; they introduce a topic, argue, talk the most and make sure they win the conversation. She argues that men and women approach conversation with a distinct set of rules and interpretations of talk. Men focus on status and independence and women focus on intimacy and connection, a difference that makes the communication between the sexes problematic. She states “communication between men and women can be like cross cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversation styles”. A female manager, for instance, asks a male employee, “Do you think you can have the Project ready by Friday?” In addition, he answers affirmatively; she expects the report on Friday.
When Friday comes and the project is not ready, the (female) manager looks at the situation as failure to comply with what she considered a directive, while the (male) employee considered her comment a preference, not a directive. Eckes, (2000) in his studies states that men established status hierarchy to compete, exert control and maintain upper hand. Robb, (2000) emphasized that women also established hierarchies based on friendship, power and accomplishment. Women are more emotional than men. They focus on feelings and building relationships while men focus on power and status. Tannen’s studies have shown that men engage in solution oriented conversations aimed at the main issue. Women however, are said to engage in relationship-oriented conversations that targeted to connect with and relate to other speakers. In problem solving, men take straight forward approach compared with women who tend to establish emptiness, show concern and empathy. Glass, (2012) states that men are direct and straight forward in their speech, they use the technique of loudness to emphasize points whereas women use pitch and inflection for emphasis. Men tend to interrupt more often than women, make direct accusations and statements and ask fewer questions. According to Mehrabian, (2007), non-verbal communication includes facial expression, arm movement, posture, position and other movements of the body. Eckes, (2000) reports that women use a pleasant warm voice in conversation that is not characteristic of men conversation. Differences have also been noted with respect to the gestures used while speaking. Men are observed to use straight and sharp movements while women tend to have movements that are more fluid. In terms of posture, women tend to keep arms next to their bodies and cross their legs while men often have an open, wider posture with arms away from the body and legs apart. In visual dominance, men are considered to be more visually dominant than women. Men tend to sit side by side next to each other or stand at some distance while women sit face to face with other women or closer, indicating a more open and intimate position that help them connect with one another. For men, a face-to-face position indicates challenges or confrontations.

Cooperation verses Competition

Women foster cooperation rather than competition. Men display a higher percentage of task behaviour, providing information, direction or answer and direct disagreement. They use problem solving as an opportunity to demonstrate competence, ability to solve problems and their commitment to relationship. When thinking about the problem, they expect solutions, exerting power to accomplish the problem solving first. On the other hand, women use problem solving as a way to strengthen relationships, focussing on sharing and discussing the problem rather than the ends (Eckes, 2000). Wood supports the theory that women use communication as a way to establish and maintain relationship. She states that women are responsive, supportive, value equality and work towards sustaining communication while men use communication as a means to solve problems, maintain dominance and assertiveness. Men are more responsive, their talk is less abstract and personal.
Research Methodology

Research Design

Research design is defined as a plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and control variance. According to Orodho (2004), research design refers to all the procedures selected by a researcher for studying a particular set of questions or hypotheses. He summarizes it as a programme to guide the researcher in collecting, analyzing and interpreting observed facts. For this study, Descriptive survey method is appropriate. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2004). Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) states that descriptive studies are not only restricted to facts finding, but might often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. This design was therefore, adopted for this study as it enabled the researcher in obtaining a

Target Population

Busha and Harter (2000) define target population as a group or category which has one or more characteristics in common and has been selected as a focus of the study. It is an entire group of persons or elements that have at least one thing in common (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). A population is any set of persons or objects that possesses at least one common characteristic (Busha and Harter, 2000). The population of the study consisted of secondary school students in Makadara Sub-County. Target population refers to all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects to which a researcher wishes to generalize the results of the research study (Borg & Gall, 2009). The target population of this study included secondary school students from the ten public secondary schools in Makadara Sub-County, Nairobi as per the list issued from the District Education Office.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Orodho (2004) defines sampling as the process of selecting a sub-set of cases in order to draw conclusions about the entire set. Generally, sample size depends on factors such as the number of variables in the study, the type of research design, the method of data analysis and the size of the accessible population. Gay in Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggests that for correlation research, 30 cases or more are required; for descriptive studies, ten percent of the accessible population is enough and for experimental studies, at least 30 cases are required per group. A sample size is a smaller part of the population, which is carefully selected to represent all the main traits of the accessible population (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003). According to Gay in Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), 10% to 30% is adequate for analysis and reporting. In this study, the researcher decided to use average 10%.
Research Instruments

The data was collected using questionnaires which had both open and close ended questions. According to Kothari (2003), a questionnaire is a carefully designed instrument for collecting data in accordance with the specification of the research questions. The questionnaires are preferred due to their suitability for this type of study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) observed that questionnaires are commonly used to obtain important information about the population. Each item in the questionnaire was developed to address a specific objective, research question on project of the study. The questionnaire used consisted of both closed and open ended questions. The closed-ended questions provided data that was easy to compute and analyze, while the open-ended questions permitted a greater depth of response, thus adding quality to the data collected. For this study, there was one types of questionnaire used meant specifically for the students as the respondents.

Data Analysis

Orodho (2004) defines data analysis as a process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcript, field notes, data and other materials obtained from the field with the aim of increasing your understanding of them and enabling you to present them to others. Mugenda (2003) summarizes it as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of information collected. After the fieldwork before analysis, all the questionnaires will be adequately checked for data verification. The data will be tabulated and classified accordingly in line with the objectives of the study (Kombo, and Tromp, 2006). The coded, tabulated and classified data was subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data analysis is helpful in data evaluation because it provides quantifiable and easy to understand results. Quantitative data can be analyzed in a variety of different ways, which can help the researcher to meet his set objectives with much ease (Kombo, and Tromp, 2006). Qualitative data analysis, on the other hand helped the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the research findings. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies tallies and percentages. The statistics was generated using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and data obtained was communicated through pie charts, tables and bar graphs. Qualitative data was analyzed by organizing data in accordance with the research questions and objectives. After the whole analysis had been done, conclusions and recommendations were made. The researcher analyzed contents from other literature reviews relevant to the study on gender communication. The information collected assisted the researcher to develop a conceptual link that explained how the data collected were related to the objectives of the study. The data analysis gave the researcher insights into the problems that were tested by use of both open and close ended questionnaires given to the respondents to observe their behaviors and attitudes in an indirect way in order to obtain descriptive information. Random sampling was applied to select the target public secondary schools according to preferred gender and type. That is; mixed gender schools, boys boarding schools and girls boarding schools.

Stratified sampling technique was used to separate the mixed gender schools according to gender and then use purposive sampling to sample the respondents for the study (Borg and Gall, 2009).

Research Results

The general objectives of this study was to establish the role of gender communication on students’ academic behaviour and the following were the specific objectives: to establish the effects of gender conversational styles on students’ academy behaviour; to establish the effects of gender communication biases on students’ academic behaviour; to establish the effects of gender communication factors on students’ academic behavior in Makadara sub-county in Nairobi county. The study came up with many important findings which were presented according to the respondents’ demographic characteristics and objectives of the study. A total of 107 questionnaires were received from the respondents representing a response rate of 89%. This was significant to establish the answers of the research questions and form a basis of the study. The study findings indicate that 34.2% of the respondents were female and 55.0% were male respondents. Literature was reviewed in chapter two which included the theoretical review and the conceptual framework of the literature. In the review of literature, it explained the relationship between independent variables which are gender conversational style. Gender communication biases and gender communication factors. The conceptual framework explained the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. Methodology was explained in chapter three. The study adapted the descriptive survey research design.

The target population for this study was 1200 students from ten public secondary schools in Makadara sub-county Nairobi. The sample size was made up of 324 respondents who were the representative of the target population. Data was collected using questionnaires. Data was analyzed using percentages and frequencies and presented using report tables, graphs and pie charts. Chapter four shows the analysis of the data collected from the respondents presented according to the research questions. It consisted of the demographic information which included the gender of the respondents, the type of school they are in, the gender of the teacher of the opposite sex and the subject the teacher taught them in form three. It also consisted of objective questions related to the research questions. The current study revealed that there are gender differences in communication and can have an impact on students’ academic behaviour in learning institutions.

The study findings show that there are gender communication differences in learning institutions. This is in line with the findings on table 4.5 where 65.00% of the respondents strongly agreed that male and female teachers teach differently. This is in support of Tannen’s (2006) genderlect theory which explains that miscommunication occurs all the time between men and women because of the different cultures they come from. The findings also indicate that there still gender stereotypes on issues of subjects suited for male and females. This is clearly shown in the findings of table 4.3 that shows that science subjects are dominated by male teachers where as art subjects
are dominated by female teachers. Gender disparity in ten public secondary schools in Makadara sub-county can still be noted with 35.0% of the respondents from boys boarding schools, 20.83% from girls boarding schools and 33.33% from mixed day and boarding schools. 30.8% of the respondents agreed that teachers encouraged discussions when teaching. 50.5% disagreed with the statement that the teacher used commanding voice when teaching. 38.32% agreed with the statement that the teacher asked many questions when teaching thus encouraged discussions in their conversations (Eckes, 2000).

Conclusions

In trying to find an explanation for the educational relevance of a teacher’s gender in relation to interactions with students in classroom environment, student’s response and opinions can clearly be seen from the findings of this study. For example the potential existence of role model effect implies that a student will improve his or her intellectual engagement, conduct and academic performance when assigned to a teacher of the the same gender is lacking. The recent literature on the phenomenon known as stereotype threat provides another perspective on how students might react to a teacher’s gender. Therefore, differences in gender communication have been established in this study. Female students prefer to be taught by male teachers while male students prefer to be taught by female teachers.

The study established that there are gender differences in communication. Though the findings contradict the theories and the literature review which explains that gender differences in communication occurs between opposite genders. These findings show that gender differences in communication in learning institutions fall between female students and female teachers and vice versa. The study established that the gender stereotype still exists in learning institutions following the findings that showed that science subjects are still dominated by male teachers whereas female teachers dominated the languages and art subjects. The results of this research study indicate that there is still lack of role models in the learning institutions. Female students are supposed emulate female teachers as their role models while male students are supposed to have male teachers as their role models. This is not the case in this study as the students prefer to be taught by teachers of the opposite gender. The results of this research indicate that students are not given the opportunity to voice their opinions and feelings freely on how their teachers interact with them during their learning experiences. This was shown in this study when students went to an extent of naming particular teachers by names and mentioning statements like attitudes, mood swings and being over strict as some of the reasons for not preferring the teachers of the same gender.
References


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