

Perceived Self-Competence as a Consequence Of Gender, Socio-Economic Status and Birth-Order

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Abstract

The focus of this study was the main and interaction effects of gender, socio-economic status and birth-order on the perceived self-competence of young adolescents. One hundred and twenty Junior Secondary School one, two, three, and S.S one-students randomly selected from two schools in Ibadan participated in the study. There was no significant interaction effect of gender, socio-economic status and birth-order on overall self-competence, no main effect of birth-order was also found, however, a significant main effect of gender on self-competence was found.

Introduction

Social interaction in terms of daily interpersonal interaction, quality and nature of this interaction depends on how we explain our own behaviour, how we perceive our abilities, characteristics and experiences in life. Self-competence thus mean self-knowledge which is expected to help individuals exhibit more rational behaviour, since they must have explored their own motives and intentions. Bem (1967), in his self perception theory states that a person forms his or her attitudes through self-observation of behaviour, in other words, there is the need for a person to know him or herself very well to be able to engage in effective interaction in his/her environment.

Conceptualizing self-competence is not as straight forward, thus, previous works have made attempt to operationalize it by measuring a wide range of constructs which include cognitive competencies, physical skills, popularity, acceptance by parents, morality, personality traits, physical characteristic and effective reactions (Harter 1982; Piers, 1969). This approach make self-competence a conglomerate of constructs summed together to arrive at a composite concept. One major consideration in this approach is that people (adolescents) are not competent to the same degree in every skill domain, one or two of the domains may have dominant effects on the overall feeling of competence of an individual thereby influencing the perceived self-competence of the individual. For instance, an individual who excels in sports which is in the physical domain may have a positive self-competence despite his/her deficiency in cognitive competencies.

Harter (1982) in constructing the perceived competence scale identified three domains which were grouped as subscales, these are: cognitive competence

(academic performance), social competence (relationship with peers), and physical competence (doing well at sports and outdoor games). Harter later added a fourth subscale known as the general self-worth (self-esteem) subscale, this was informed by the argument that self-esteem cannot be objectively inferred from the responses from the first three subscales, rather, it must be directly measured. The general self-worth/self-esteem has to do with self-evaluation of how much an individual likes him or herself, being sure of one self, feeling good about the way one acts etc.

Pennigton (1992) describes self-esteem as how we think about or evaluate ourselves, thinking in terms of physical, moral, personal, social and in relation to family. Basically, self-esteem is a function of the opinions and judgements other people make of us, as well as social comparisons. People are said to have high self-esteem when they perceive themselves to be intelligent, competent and well-adjusted while the opposite is considered as low self-esteem.

Social competence of people is reflected in how they relate with others in the environment, the ease and smoothness with which they make friends and get along with friends and even strangers could be an indication of their level of social competence. Individuals that are high in social competence domain are thus expected to be outgoing, friendly, with good interpersonal and communication skills and all these attributes contribute to the overall perceived competence of the individual.

There are various demographic, socio and psychological variables that can enhance or hinder the perception of competence by individuals, some of these factors that this present study is interested in are gender, socio-economic status and birth order. Gender and socio economic status are considered as groups that individuals must belong to, and these in no small way influence our interactions with people and environment, our perceptions of the world and ourselves, our behaviour, and our feeling of competence. The impact of these groups individuals belong to was emphasized by Deaux (1997), and Rowley et al (1998) when they stated that individuals who belong to socially advantaged groups have better perception of themselves than their counterparts who do not.

Gender has been found over the years to have profound influence on how individuals perceive themselves and their abilities, this may not be unconnected with traditional views that one sex is stronger than the other, and various socialization processes that make distinctions between dressings in males and females, roles and other societal expectations in general. All these inform how an individual defines him or herself as well as his or her perceived competence. Grantteese, Trew and Turner (1988) in a study found that boys have higher self-esteem and physical self-competence than girls.

Socio-economic status is also a factor that influences the self-competence of individuals, to a large extent it does influence how people define and see the world, determines the groups they can join, the schools they can attend and

in some societies their level of aspirations. In separate studies, Wittfang and Scarnberz (1990) and Olowu (1986), found that people of higher socio economic status have significant better perception of themselves than those in the middle and lower socioeconomic classes.

The third independent variable of interest in this study is birth order, this is the ordinal position a person occupies amongst his or her siblings. This variable also has influence on the perception of individuals vis-a-viz their ambitions, relationship with parents, siblings, peers and the world at large. Cohen (1985) carried out a study on birth order and found that first borns are usually more ambitious, helpful, responsible, less oriented toward peers, their own needs and social activities than later borns. However, some first borns were found to have low self-competence due to over protection and over indulgence by their parents.

Interesting questions that this study must answer include whether there exist a difference between perception and actual competence, and if gender, socio-economic status and birth order will have any effect on perception of self-competence. To this end the following hypotheses were tested:

There will be significant main and interaction effects of gender, socioeconomic status and birth-order on self-competence.

There will be significant main and interaction effects of gender, socioeconomic status and birth-order on adolescents' self-worth.

There will be significant main and interaction effects of gender, socioeconomic status and birth-order on adolescents' social competences.

Design

Multivariate research design is used for this study. Self-competence is the dependent variable, it has two domains the self-worth (self-esteem) domain and the social competence domain. The independent variables are gender, socioeconomic status and birth order.

Participants

The subjects were made up of 120 J.S.S one, two, three and S.S. one student randomly selected from the Polytechnic Ibadan High School and Orogun Grammar School, Orogun, Ibadan. Age of subjects ranged between 11 and 18 years, subjects were matched on sex and so there were 60 males and 60 females.

Instrument

Harter (1982) perceived competence scale for children (PCPS) was the instrument used for data collection. This scale is divided into four subscales: cognitive competence, social competence, physical competence and self-worth. The coefficient Alpha was 0.76, 0.78, 0.83 and 0.73 respectively.

Procedure

The scale was administered to subjects in their respective schools, at each of the schools the randomly selected subjects were all put in the same hall with instruction on how to complete the scale and that there were no right or wrong answers, the exercise was purely for academic purpose. Subjects were as well informed of their right to choose not to participate in the study, having said these, confidentiality was assured and the scale was subsequently administered.

Statistical Analyses

Three separate Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were carried out to determine the effects of the independent variables on the various domains of the dependent variable.

Results

Gender, socioeconomic status and Birth order on overall self-competence. The result shown in Table 1 indicates no interaction effects of the three independent variables on self-competence $F(4,102)=2.24, P>.05$ (see Table 1). There is also no main effect of Birth-order on self-competence $F(2,102)=0.69, P>.05$.

However, a significant main effect of gender on self-competence was found. $F(1,1022)=8.79, P<.05$ (Table 1). Socio economic status as well has a significant main effect on self-competence $F(2,102)=5.63, P<.05$ (see Table 1).

Table 1

Summary of 3-way ANOVA showing the main and interaction effect of gender, SES and birth-order on general self-competence

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	P
GENDER	1246.105	1	1346.108	8.791	<0.05
Birth-Order	211.199	2	105.599	0.690	>0.05
Ses	1723.829	2	861.915	5.629	<0.05
3-Way Interaction					
SEX-BIRTH-SES					
Model	52287.905	17	311.053	2.031	>0.05
Residual	15618.462	102	153.122		
Total	20906.367	119	175.684		

Gender, SES and Birth-order on self-worth

There is no significant interactions of the variables on self-worth, gender and Birth-order. $F(4,102)=1.50>.05$; $F(1,102)=0.51, P>.05$; $F(2,102)=0.22, P>.05$.

SES however, has a significant main effect on self-worth, $F(2,102)=7.69$, $P<0.05$ (See Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of ANOVA showing the main and interaction effect of gender, SES and birth – order on Self-esteem i.e. self worth of the self – competence.

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	P
GENDER	10.149	1	10.149	0.506	>0.05
Birth order	9.004	2	4.502	0.224	>0.05
SES	308.857	2	154.429	7.699	<0.05
3-way interaction	120.411	4	30.103	1.501	>0.05
SEX					
SES					
MODEL	557.8895	17	32.817	2.636	>0.05
RESIDUAL	2045.897	102	20.088		
TOTAL	2603.792	199	21.881		

Gender, SES and Birth-order on social competence.

There is no significant interaction effect on social competence neither is there any significant main effects of the variables. For interaction, $F(4,102)=1.28$, $P>0.05$. Gender, $F(1,102)=0.47$, $P>0.05$. Birth-order, $F(2,102)=1.22$, $P>0.05$. SES, $F(2,102)=1.93$, $P>0.05$ (see Table 3).

Table 3

Summary of ANOVA showing the main and interaction effect of gender, SES and birth-order on social competence domain of the self-competence.

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	P
GENDER	5.113	1	5.113	0.473	>0.05
BIRTH-ORDER	48.189	2	24.094	2.229	>0.05
SES	41.782	2	20.891	1.932	>0.05
3-way interaction, SEX, BIRTH-SES	55.3098	4	13.827	1.277	>0.05
MODEL	163.054	17	10.768	0.996	>0.05
TOTAL	1235.867	119	10.806		

Discussion and Conclusion

Going by the results obtained in this study it is discovered that gender, socio economic status and Birth order do not have any significant effects on self-competence of adolescents, thus the first hypothesis is rejected; this means that in looking at the impact or influence of socio-demographic variables on self-competence focus should not be on joint interaction rather main effects of the variables can be considered. Gender on its own was however, found to have a main effect on overall self-competence, this is consistent with traditional beliefs that there exist a world of difference between males and females, of course, these two groups are socialized to be different and this process influence how they see and relate with the world, form their personality and inform their perceived self competence. Granese et al (1988), in a study reported significant difference between males and females. Socio-economic status was also found to have a significant main effect on self-competence, a look at the means shows that people of high socio economic status have higher perception of self-competence than those of middle and low socio-economic classes. This finding may not be unconnected with the nature of our society where winner takes all and losers see their inability to achieve as a personal failure, which then affects their feelings of competence negatively, this finding is consistent with the finding of Olowu (1980). Meanwhile, birth-order was found not to have a significant main effect on self-competence. Considering the second hypothesis, no significant interaction effects of gender, SES and birth order on self-worth (self-esteem) were found, also, no main effects of sex and birth-order also exist on self-worth. The finding on self-worth contradicts the conclusion of Granleese et al (1988), who found in their study that there exist a difference between the self-esteem of boys and girls, with boys having higher self-esteem. However, socio-economic status has a significant main effect on self-worth, people from high socioeconomic class possess better self-competence. This finding is in line with the findings of Wiltfang & Scambergz (1990) and Olowu (1986), these researchers found that people of higher socio economic status have significant better perception of themselves than those in the middle and lower socio-economic classes. The third hypothesis of this study is completely rejected, in that no interaction effects of gender, SES and birth order exist on social competence, neither is there any significant main effects observed. The reason for these findings is not so clear-cut since most of the previous studies have found significant effects, specifically, on birth-order Cohen (1985) reported significant difference between firstborns and later borns, with first borns described as ambitious, helpful, responsible, etc. However, the obtained result in this present study may be due to cultural, situational and socialization differences.

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