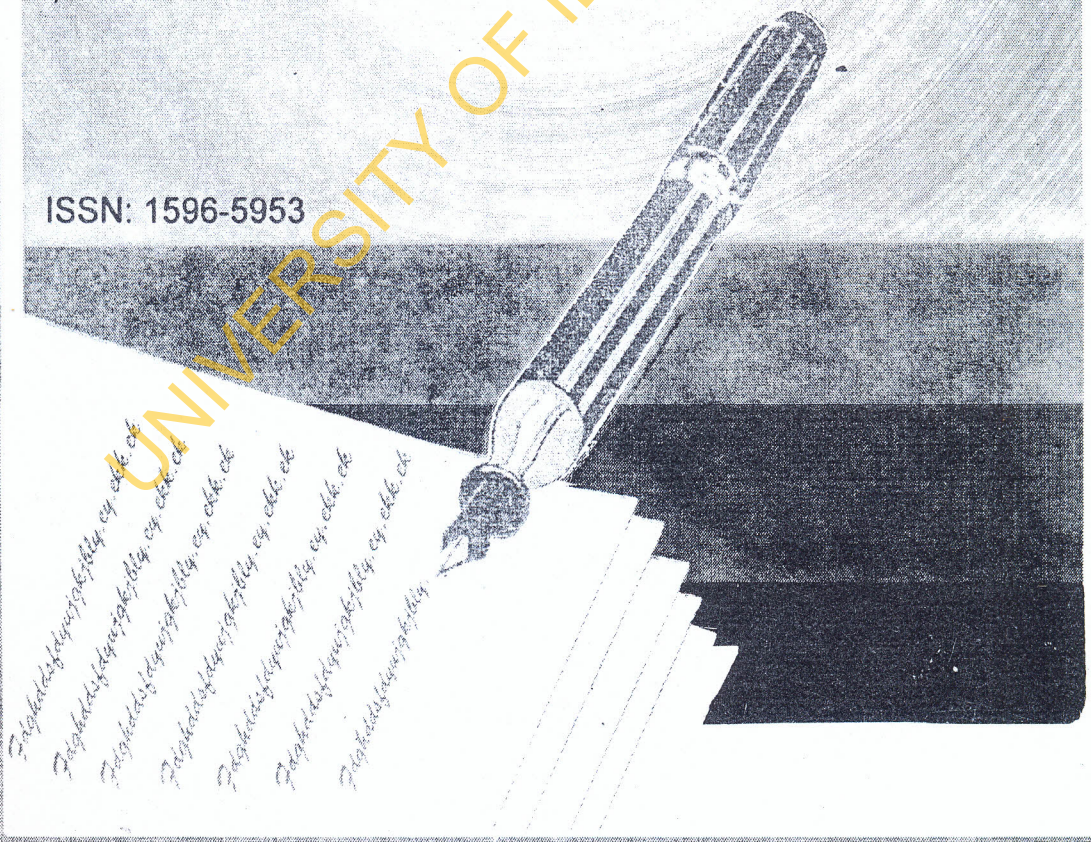
IBADAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Vol. 2 No 2 July - Dec. 2002

(IJES)

ISSN: 1596-5953



Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies

Vol. 2 No 2 July - Dec. 2002

Contents

PATTERNS OF UNDERGRADUATES' ATTITUDE TO ACADEMIC WORK

BY

DR. E. A. OKWILAGWE
Institute of Education
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Abstract
The study was designed to examine the pattern of undergraduate students' attitude to academic work in order to create insight into how they learn. A 23-item Attitude to Academic Work Scale (ATAWS) was administered to 348 undergraduates in three Universities – Ibadan, Ilorin and Olabisi Onabanjo. The findings revealed that undergraduates of both gender, are similar in their pattern of attitude to academic work in many ways, while the few areas of divergent attitudes are indications that the students need re-orientation of attitudes towards academic work. Nevertheless, these findings spell implications for the quality of socialization process that determine personality, the level of motivation and processing of academic information, as well as societal control of means of livelihood. Thus, it was suggested that major stakeholders in tertiary education in Nigeria, should put in place educational policies that are capable of improving the attitudes of Nigerian undergraduates to academic work.

Introduction

Attitude has been defined as a moderately intense emotion that predisposes an individual to respond consistently in a favourable or unfavourable manner when confronted with a particular object (Anderson, 1991). There is no gainsaying the fact that, attitude, especially the development of the right attitude either to academic work or to life is a basic learning outcome of intrinsic worth that a country's educational process would want to inculcate in her populace.

The possession of positive attitude is so crucial in a student's life that various educationists have over the years addressed the importance of its development. For instance, Ebel (1972) conceives that development of right attitude to academic

work is more important than the attainment of high grades. The views of Obemeata (1984) corroborate Ebel's (1972) contention when he asserts, that, attitudes and other affective behaviour are as important as intelligence in the process of education and in the practical affairs of everyday life because a person's attitude is representative of that person's personality.

Studies have shown that home factors, to a very large extent, play significant role in preparing children for academic learning that could sustain them through the schooling years. Redding (1992) identified family values such as high regard for personal development; communication, responsibility and worthiness while Onocha (1985) revealed that among five home predictors, occupation of parents and academic material possession are potent home factors of success. In a recent study to determine changes in medical students' attitude as they progress through a medical course, results show that a striking difference exists between male and female medical students in the first year, due to early socialization. However, at the beginning of the 5th year, substantial changes in attitude had developed with little changes thereafter although gender difference between the sexes persisted (Price, Price and Williams, 1998). Various other studies have tried to find support for gender differences in attitude. Weinburgh (1995) revealed that more males than females show positive attitudes towards science and science achievement. Studies such as Pelemo (1995) and Onafowokan (1997) have observed gender differences in attitude to academic work. However, when students were exposed to Biology concepts as suggested by Olagbaju (1995) or to computer assisted learning as conducted by Abouserie (1992), no relationship was found between gender, concept mapping and cognitive style on the one hand and gender, cognitive style or academic success on the other.

The above views and studies presuppose that the development of the right attitude to work and to learning by students at all levels of learning is crucial to the attainment of good performance in any learning endeavour. However, further evidence exists to show the role of the school or learning environment in attitude formation. For instance, Ramsden (1984) revealed that students' interests; attitudes to study and approaches to academic task are strongly related to their experiences of teaching and assessment.

Attitude, whether conceived as a process or a product of learning has been found by some researchers to significantly influence students' achievements in various school subjects and in the effective teaching of these subjects. The general contention from these various studies seem to suggest that favourable attitudes are important determinants of achievements in various disciplines (Astin, 1993), and moreso in the physical sciences (Fennema and Sherma, 1976; and Price, Price and Williams, 1998). Also positive attitudes are some of the characteristics that distinguish persisters from non-persisters in teacher preparation (Pigge and Marso, 1992), make candidates to enter the teaching profession (Villeme and Hall, 1980) and change practicing teachers' attitudes towards sciences and science teaching (Okpala and Onocha, 1985).

From the foregoing, the importance of positive attitudes of students in learning cannot be overemphasized. A study on the influence of gender on attitude to work of Nigerian undergraduate will shed more light on the patterns of attitude to academic work of these students, and consequently, explain how these students learn.

Research Question

To actualize the objectives of the study, one research question and one hypothesis were formulated and tested in the work:

What is the pattern of undergraduate students' attitude to academic work by gender?

Hypothesis

There will be no significant gender difference in the pattern of the students' attitude to academic work?

Method

Sample

This consisted of 348 final year students enrolled for the 4-years degree programme in five departments (English, Mathematics, Economics, Chemistry and Education) of three Nigerian Universities – Universities of Ibadan, Ilorin and Olabisi Onabanjo.

Instrument

A valid and reliable instrument – Attitude of Students to Academic Work Scale (ATAWS) was administered on the

students before the end of their respective programmes. It measured students' attitude to academic work. The scale dimensions – effectiveness of instruction and effectiveness of administration, tests and examinations, lectures and assignments, studying, usefulness of university education, and time required of students and assessment method had psychometric properties of between 0.53-0.77 as established by Okwilagwe (2000a) using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha. The students responded on a 4-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The negative items were scored in the reverse order.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The attitude of students to academic work scale (ATAWS) was administered to students in the last semester of their respective programmes. The data collected were analysed using percentage and frequency counts to indicate the number of subjects who strongly agree/agree to positive statements depicting good or favourable attitudes to work or strongly disagree/disagree to statements depicting unfavourable attitudes to academic work. This enabled the researcher to present the data in profiles. To be considered prevalent in high amount, the percentage response to each item was put as 80% and above while a percentage response of 50-79% was considered modest. Significant gender difference in attitude to academic work was tested using the t-test for significance at the 0.05 probability level.

Results

The results of the pattern of attitude to academic work by students are presented in Table 1 (first two columns) and in Figure 1. Table 1 (first two columns) shows the percentage responses of male and female undergraduates' attitude to academic work. Except for items (4, 5 and 15) of the attitude to academic work scale which did not reach the criterion level depicting high attitudes, results in Table 1 (columns one and two) and Figure 1, indicate that both male and female gender are positively and favourably disposed to the positive items such as (1, 9, 10, 14, 18, 8, 12, 21, 22, 23, 7, 17) and to the negative items such as (16, 19, 20, 2, 3, 6, 11, 13) of the attitudes to

academic work scale. This result would mean that both male and female genders were favourably disposed to the quality of instruction in their departments (87.4% and 88.5% respectively). They are encouraged to work harder as a result of the commitment to teaching by lecturers (92.7% and 93.6% respectively), enjoy lecture hours (81.7% and 86.0% respectively) and enjoy studying for tests (89.5% ad 84.1% respectively). Both sexes were willing to obtain a university degree if given another opportunity to do so (97.4% and 94.3% respectively). Both gender were also moderately disposed to efficient conduct of examination in their departments (73.3% and 66.2% respectively). They are satisfied with time-table planning in their departments (60.2% and 56.1% respectively), and had adequate time for academic work (56.5% and 52.9% respectively). In addition to being provided with clear guidelines on assessment standard expected to them, they are satisfied with the method of evaluating students' work (60.2% and 59.2% and 69.6% and 72.6% respectively), and also well disposed to taking examination (63.9% and 53.5% and had always wanted to be members of the academia 63.9% and 61.1% respectively).

Table 1: Comparison of Undergraduates' Attitude to Academic Work by Gender

	Items	Percentage Positive Response		Mean		t-test	P-level
		(a) Male	(b) Female	(a) Male	(b) Female		
1	The quality of instruction in my department is adequate	139 (87.4)	167 (88.5)	1.94	1.94	0.01	NS
2	Poor organization of teaching by some lecturers in my department	82 (50.8)	97 (52.2)	2.50	2.45	0.53	NS
3	Vital information about course requirements are left till last minute in my department	82 (50.8)	97 (52.2)	2.51	2.45	0.63	NS
4	Absence of reagents and chemicals in my department make me unhappy	14 (12.6)	24 (8.9)	3.27	3.24	0.33	NS
5	I feel relaxed when examination is approaching	80 (45.0)	86 (5.10)	2.62	2.50	1.28	NS
6	I am often scared taking tests	104 (69.6)	133 (66.2)	2.09	2.15	-0.55**	NS
7	Have always liked taking examinations	84 (63.9)	122 (53.5)	2.29	2.50	-2.36*	NS
8	The conduct of examination in my department is satisfactory	104 (73.3)	140 (66.2)	2.08	2.24	-1.74	NS

9	I am encouraged to work harder by lecturers who are committed to teaching	147 (92.7)	177 (93.6)	1.51	1.39	1.59	NS
10	Lecture hours are enjoyable	134 (81.7)	156 (86.0)	2.02	2.02	-0.05	NS
11	Bored by doing assignments	116 (70.7)	135 (73.9)	2.25	2.20	0.68**	NS
12	Timetable planning in my department is satisfactory	88 (60.2)	115 (56.1)	2.30	2.50	-2.31*	NS
13	Writing term paper often make me angry	117 (71.7)	137 (74.5)	2.14	2.17	-0.28**	NS
14	I enjoy studying for my tests	132 (89.5)	171 (84.1)	1.83	1.97	-1.84	NS
15	Wish I never had to study to pass course examinations	69 (56.0)	107 (43.9)	2.42	2.55	-1.33	NS
16	Studying for course examination is boring	126 (81.3)	155 (80.3)	1.99	2.01	-0.30**	NS
17	Have always wanted to be a member of the academic community	96 (63.9)	122 (61.1)	2.25	2.39	-1.29	NS
18	Will obtain a University degree, if I have my life to live again	148 (97.4)	186 (94.3)	1.28	1.40	-1.68	NS
19	Having a University degree is a waste of time	147 (97.9)	187 (93.6)	1.25	1.38	-1.93**	NS
20	University education has no place in modern times	148 (97.4)	186 (94.3)	1.17	1.31	-2.08* (**)	0.05
21	Students have adequate time for academic work in my department	83 (56.5)	108 (52.9)	2.42	2.50	-0.82	NS
22	Clear guidelines on the assessment standard expected of students, is given in my department	93 (60.2)	115 (59.2)	2.36	2.41	-0.68	NS
23	Method of evaluating students' work in my department is fair	114 (69.6)	133 (73.6)	2.28	2.29	-0.22	NS

* Significant at P < .05

** Responses connoting negative attitude to work.

(a) Males = 191; (b) Females = 157

Figure in parentheses are in percentages.

Figure I: Students' Attitude to Academic Work by Gender

Table I (columns 1 and 2) and figure 1 equally indicate that a modest number of both gender feel that some lecturers in their departments poorly organize their teaching while vital information about course requirements are withheld till the last minutes (50.8% by 52.2%) and 50.8% by 52.2%) respectively, both gender equally feel that they are scared taking tests (69.6%

by 66.2%), are bored doing assignments (70.7% by 73.9%) while term paper writing seem to anger them (71.7% by 74.5%).

The results of the difference in gender attitude to academic work are equally presented in Table 1 (columns 3-6). The table shows that items 7, 12 and 20 were significant pattern of attitude to academic work of both genders. These items have to do with a liking to always wanting to take examination (Mean = 2.29 and 2.50 respectively), satisfaction with timetable planning in the departments (Mean = 2.30 and 2.50 respectively), and little worth of university education in modern times (Mean = 1.17 and 1.31 respectively).

Discussion

Findings from this study indicate the fact that the patterns of students' attitude to academic work irrespective of the gender, is similar in most respect. Evidence from the results of this study suggests that both gender are highly favourably disposed to the quality of instruction in their departments, working hard, finding lectures interesting and studying for tests enjoyable, and are prepared to obtain university degrees.

In spite of these good attitudinal disposition to work exhibited by these students, it would seem that a modest number of these undergraduates, do not seem to like studying too hard before passing their examination. They also expressed the fear of taking tests beside the experience of boredom and lethargy at doing assignments or writing term papers. Also, worthy of note is the undergraduates' attitudes to the worth of obtaining a university degree and the time spent in acquiring it in modern times. In this realm, research results are indicative of negative attitudes that need to be seriously addressed by policy makers and implementers of education in order to rectify this apparent wrong orientation of undergraduates' attitude to academic work in Nigeria.

The implications of these findings are attributable to an origin and possibly causes of a multidimensional nature. First, it should be noted that from the insights that psychologists have thrown into 'learning' as a concept, studying and doing academic work do not come easy for a vast majority of people except for a few privileged persons with superior intelligent quotients referred to as 'geniuses'. And, so for the people in the former category, doing tests, writing term papers and assignments may seem to

be cumbersome, boring and distasteful if the will power and determination to succeed is lacking. Second, in as much as the fear of the unknown would seem to be natural, it must be stressed that what should be the overriding factor in any fear provoking situation such as taking tests or examinations – is the determination to succeed rather than withdrawal. Third, the feelings as portrayed by these generality of undergraduates would seem to stem from the lethargy and disgust that most unemployed Nigerian graduates experience. These experiences range from being confined to idleness at home or odd jobs that are not directly related to their areas of specialization due to lack of government and gainful jobs, after obtaining first and/or second degrees. Newspaper headlines such as "10,000 applicants battle for 2013 Federal jobs" (Comet Newspaper; 4th December, 2000) besides other teeming state applicants struggling for non-existing state jobs, are common news items featuring in most Nigerian dailies, that depict the prevailing economic scenario in the country. Sarumi (1998) cited several empirical evidences; where he explicitly discussed the psychology of the unemployed adult. He painted a gloomy picture of traumatic experience, vis-à-vis physical, emotional, mental and psychological consequences of the unemployed, many of whom he said may find themselves becoming permanently maladjusted for life. It is the belief here, that Nigeria, a country aspiring for economic and technological development cannot at this stage of development afford to risk or lose the lives of her cherished populace through improper planning and implementation of educational and economic policies. There is, therefore, the need for a rethink by policy makers and implementers, to ensure that the nation takes the right cause of action.

By and large, these findings find support in previous studies such as Svensson (1977) and Barnes (1997). For instance, Svensson (1977) in Willis (1993) explained that tertiary students who attempt to succeed academically using reproductive learning strategies rote learning instead of higher order learning are likely to face long hours of 'tedious work', while students who lack the necessary motivation to undertake such study find learning boring, irrelevant, and are prone to having a pattern of declining efforts and increased incidence of examination failure.

The research findings also indicate that students were equally well disposed to the arrangements put in place for the conduct of examination, standard of assessment and method of evaluating their work. Nevertheless, they were dissatisfied with some lapses in administration and teaching – such as withholding vital information until very late and poor organization of lectures by some lecturers. These findings support Okwilagwe (2000d and 2000e). The assertion in these studies is the need for lecturers to be wholly committed to teaching their courses as this has been found to motivate students' interest in learning such courses.

Statistical difference exist, however, between male and female gender in the degree to which they have always liked taking examination, satisfaction in the planning of time-table in their departments and the worth they place in a university degree in modern times. These differences in attitude could be linked to differences in early socialization process both from the home (Redding, 1992), the school (Price, Price and Williams, 1998); and possibly to the incessant strike actions by various labour unions in these ivory towers.

In conclusion therefore, evidence from this study indicate that there are several similarities in the pattern of gender attitude to academic work, that should be seriously encouraged, as well as looking into those attitude that both gender strongly feel are hindrances to their own academic development and economic improvement, but are inherent in their learning environment and in the larger society.

It is suggested that major stakeholders in tertiary institutions, most especially lecturer who are in direct contact with these students should introduce undergraduates much early to "higher-order" methods of processing information especially at orientation programmes since this has been found to result in higher retention of learnt materials than when 'rote learning' is employed. Also, policymakers and implementers should evolve ways of harmonizing policies that would elevate the minds and propel the aspirations of the teeming graduates turned out by the universities in this country through the expurgation of retrogressive policies that are inimical to student's academic and personal development.

The areas of differences as observed in the study are those that have to do with personal values that the researcher feels

can still undergo further reorientation. It is therefore suggested that correct family values as those identified by Redding (1992) and even, the evolution of a national value orientation programme which should be introduced through the lower school levels, could go a long way in correcting some of these wrong values that have been held over the years.

References

Abouserie, Reda (1992). Gender, Attitude toward Computer-assisted Learning and Academic Achievement. *Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 8 No 2, 151-160.

Anderson, L. W. (1991). Attitudes and their Measurement. In Husen, T. and Postlewaite, R. M. (eds) *The International Encyclopedia of Education*, Oxford Pergamon Press.

Astin, A. W. (1993). An Empirical Topology of College Students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 34, 36-46.

Barnes, D. M. (1997). A study of Factors that Influenced the Success of At-Risk Students who Graduated from College. *Dissertation Abstract International* Vol. 58, No. 2 August.

Comet Newspaper (2000). "2000 Applicants Battle for 2013 Federal Jobs" 4th December, Front Page.

Ebel, R. L. (1972), *Essentials of Educational Measurement.* New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood, Cliff.

Fennema, E. and Sherman, J. A. (1976). Fennema-Sherman Mathematics Attitude Scales: Instruments designed to Measure Attitudes toward the Learning of Mathematics by Females and Males. *Journal for Research in Mathematics*, 6, 489-494.

Obemeata, J. O. (1984). Non Cognitive Assessment in Educational Evaluation. In Obanya PAI (ed.) *Curriculum: In Theory and in Practice.* Ibadan, Educational Research and Study Group.

Okpala, P. and Onocha, C. (1985). Improving the Attitudes of Primary School Teachers through Activity-Oriented In-service

Education Programme. *Nigerian Educational Forum*, 8, 11, June, 51-56.

Olagbaju, W. F. (1995). The Effects of Concept Mapping Cognitive Style and Gender on Learning Outcomes in Biology, Unpublished Ph.D. *Thesis*, University of Ibadan.

Onocha, O. C. (1985). Patterns of Relationships between Home and School Factors and Pupils' Learning Outcomes in Bendel Primary Science Project. *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Onafowokan, B. A. O. (1997). A Causal Interaction of Some Learner Characteristics with Conception of Heat and Temperature among Integrated Science Students. *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Okwilagwe, E. A. (2000a). Developing and Validating Academic Environmental Scale for Nigerian Students (AESFNS), Accepted for publication in *Nigerian Journal of Educational Evaluation* Vol. 1, No. 1.

Okwilagwe, E. A. (2002). Students' Perception of Academic Departments as Environments for Teaching and Learning in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. *Research in Education*, No. 68; pp 1-14.

Okwilagwe, E. A. (2000e). Undergraduate Students' Perceived Academic Environmental Characteristics as Correlates of Learning Outcomes. Accepted for publication in *Journal of Educational Evaluation* Vol. 2, No. 1.

Pelemo, I. F. (1995). A Path-Analysis Study of Some Learner Factors and Learning Outcomes in Pre-National Diploma Programme of Kaduna Polytechnic. *Unpublished Ph.D Thesis*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Pigge, F. L. and Marso, R. N. (1995). Relationships Between the Personal Attributes of and the Academic and Affective Differences found between Current and Past Teacher Candidates: Possible Implications for Recruitment Practices in

the 1990's. *Paper represented at the Annual Meetings of the Association of Teacher Educators*, Detriot, ML Feb. 18-22.

Price, J; Price, D. and Williams, G. (1998). Changes in Medical Student's Attitudes as they Progress through a Medical Course. *Journal of Medical – Ethnics*, Vol. 24, No. 2 April, pp 110-117.

Ramsden, Paul (1984). *"The Context of Learning"*, in F. Marton et al (Eds.). *The Experience of Learning.* Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Redding, S. (1992). Family Values, Curriculum of the Home and Educational Productivity. *School Community Journal;* Vol. 2, No. 1 Spring-Summer, pp. 62-69

Sarumi, A. A. (1998). The Psychology of Adult Unemployed: With Special Reference to Nigeria and Some Other Selected Countries in Africa. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June pp. 111-122.

Svensson, L. (1977). On Qualitative Differences in Learning: 11 Study Skill and learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology.* 47, pp. 233-243.

Villeme, M. G. and Hall, B. (1980). The Relation of Teacher Attitude to Major, Employment Status, Teaching Level and Satisfaction with Teaching for First Year Teachers. *Humanistic Education.* 19, 85-90.

Willis, D. (1993). Learning and Assessments: Exposing the Inconsistencies of Theory and Practice. *Journal of Oxford Review of Education* Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 383-402.

Weinburgh, M. (1995). Gender Differences in Students' Attitude Towards Science: A Meta-analysis of the Literature from 1970 to 1991. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching.* Vol. 32, No. 4, 387-398, April.