

Gender and Teacher Influence on Students' attitude towards C.R.E

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Abstract: *The role of the teacher and gender on students' attitude towards the subjects done in school including C.R.E is important as a way of improving performance in examinations. This paper examines how gender based opinions and teachers influence students' attitudes towards Christian Religious Education (henceforth, CRE) in secondary schools in Kenya and how these reflect on the performance in the subject. The study uses questionnaires which consist of both close and open-ended items. The close ended items have statements each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. It is notable that the more positive the learners' attitude is, the better the performance. On the contrary, gender influence have the least impact as the majority of the learners evenly distributed across the various achievement brackets thought it had no impact on the choice of C.R.E at all.*

Keywords: *Teacher Influence, Gender Influence, Attitude, Performance, Christian Religious Education*

I. Introduction

A person's gender-role attitudes reflect beliefs about the roles of men and women. These attitudes define the kinds of things that are acceptable or appropriate for men to engage in but not women, and vice versa. For example, people vary in the degree to which they endorse the idea that women should be just as able to do science oriented subjects as equals with men or even better. Conversely there is also variation in opinion as to whether humanities and social sciences like religious education are meant for women and not men. Such gender based attitudes have an influence on students' attitudes towards certain subjects, and in the long run may influence performance in these subjects. In addition, attitudes towards certain subjects may also be influenced by the teacher teaching such subjects. This paper examines how gender based opinions and teachers influence students' attitudes towards Christian Religious Education (henceforth, CRE) in secondary schools in Kenya.

II. Gender and Attitude

The relationship between gender and attitudes is in no way straight forward. Several studies done reveal mixed results. A survey conducted by the American Association of university women referred to as AAUW(1992) revealed that as girls grow, they lose confidence in their abilities, expect less from life and lose interest in challenging courses of study and rewarding careers particularly pursuits involving mathematics and science. Atkinson (1979) carried out a study on factors influencing attitudes of black college freshmen and found that the sex of a student was not related to their attitudes. Similar sentiments were expressed by Edward (1973) who found no difference in the attitudes of male and female college students towards mathematics.

2.1 The teacher, gender and other determinants of attitude

It has been established that boys and girls experience schooling differently and are treated differently by teachers depending on whether they are girls or boys. Research has shown that the interactions between teachers and boys and between teachers and girls vary in frequency, duration and content. Consequently, boys and girls develop different perceptions of their abilities and relationships (Gipps et al, 1994). This poses a challenge to teachers especially in mixed schools. Teachers ought to treat both boys and girls equally so that none feels better than the other in academic performance.

Further, mode of socialization leads girls and boys to develop different attitudes to certain academic disciplines. It is hypothesized that negative attitudes will influence whether students will feel able to engage with certain tasks and the subsequent quality of their engagement. The prediction is that negative attitudes will result in lower performance. This concurs with the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Another related hypothesis (Gipps et al, 1994) concerns students' perceptions of the value of certain subjects for themselves and their future lives. Boys tend to see maths and science as important for their future careers. Both boys and girls equally agree that these subjects are of less value for girls' lives and careers. Such perceptions affect students' motivation which will in turn influence their engagement in domain – specific tasks. The

predicted consequence is that students' performance may be affected and their potential learning either limited or enhanced depending on their view of the appropriateness of the activities they are expected to engage in. The findings of this study revealed that boys and girls consider C.R.E to be a subject that is important for their future lives.

Similar studies have revealed that there is a correlation between attitude and performance. The different attitudes of boys and girls as groups to subjects or aspects of subjects reflect pupils' learnt behaviours about their own capabilities and what constitutes appropriate behaviour for them. These different attitudes alter pupils' level of confidence, which in turn influences their performance. Attitudes can also influence what pupils see as significant in tasks, which depending on their gender and the image of the subject can focus them onto the task at hand or lead them to perceive an alternative task or no task at all. The effect of different attitudes can therefore enhance or depress performance on a task irrespective of achievement. Owiti's (2001) study on Gender difference in attitude towards mathematics in Eldoret Municipality showed that there is a significant relationship between student's gender and their attitudes towards Mathematics. He also established that parental view on maths influenced students' attitudes towards maths.

Children go to school with learning styles already developed, some of which are not different from those advocated in various subjects but incompatible with them (Cohen 1986). The people that pupils interact with can influence their attitude towards certain subjects. Bray et al (1986) noted that schools may have hidden biases in the subjects which boys and girls are encouraged to study. An international study based on six countries revealed that secondary girls tend to be steered into such subjects as domestic science and to aspire to home duties and low status jobs rather than paid employment and high status jobs.

III. The C.R.E Teacher's Role and Influence

The C.R.E teacher has a role to play in the teaching and learning of C.R.E. This is because the student considers the teacher to be a role model. Therefore the C.R.E teacher should be a motivator, speak with conviction and be able to evaluate what he has taught. He/she should be a role model and manager of student behaviour. The teacher should love to teach and not just teach for money. Some qualities that should be portrayed on the part of the C.R.E teacher are devotion, commitment, imagination, creativity, confidence, caution and wisdom. This is because teaching C.R.E is a challenging undertaking since it involves the teacher inspiring pupils towards proper moral behaviour (Malusu & Otiende, 1994).

Teachers ought to realize that being a good role model to students contributes to some extent in enabling students have a favourable attitude towards C.R.E. Professionally, the teacher should be trained, inspired and must attend seminars. This is for effective delivery of the teaching content. The C.R.E teacher should also organize and encourage discussions on the challenges of Christian living in a fast changing Kenyan society. He/she should explore and relate the pupils' interests and experiences during his teaching, making students feel that they are valued. In turn, they will be able to apply the Christian teaching to their own circumstances, basing their decision-making on the moral teaching from their religious education lessons (Malusu & Otiende 1994).

In order to maximize on the teacher influence, teacher training is a necessity since one applies a variety of teaching methods in order to get good examination results. There are three different attitudes expected of the C.R.E teacher. These are:-

- a) Commitment to producing good examination results.
- b) Commitment to the Christian faith and fostering of such commitment in students.
- c) Commitment to the education of the students, so that the students become educated in their Christian adherence.

The teacher's expression of the above attitudes will not only have a positive impact on the students' behaviour but also their results. One of the major tasks of educators and especially C.R.E teachers is to guide the students in the exercise of turning acquired attitudes into responsibly chosen values, so that they can eventually justify what they hold. This is because they come to school with socially acquired attitudes. The students should not be forced to accept certain religious teachings but should be guided by the teacher to take responsibility for their chosen values. C.R.E. does not mean that the student has to be made religious but he has to be educated in being religious. The implication for young people is that they are gradually made to take responsibility for what they believe and reject. Religion is something children inherit from their parents. Therefore C.R.E. helps students to play a more active, free-role in inheriting religion making it a question of free choice and decision. The implication for the C.R.E. teacher is that the classroom is not a place for preaching but for helping people become more reasonable and responsible.

Munguti (1984) established that teachers with a positive attitude towards a programme will implement the programme successfully while those with negative attitudes will have problems in implementing the programme. This equally applies to the teaching of C.R.E. The teachers' attitudes towards C.R.E affect the

teaching and learning of the subject. If the teacher's attitude is negative, commitment to teaching will be lacking hence the learner's performance will be affected. Wainaina (1984) carried out a study to find the problems affecting teachers in implementing the Christian Religious Education Curriculum. She established that textbooks were inadequately provided for. Teachers complained that the syllabus was too wide to be covered within the specified period. There was inadequate in-service training for teachers of C.R.E. If learning has to be effected and meaningful, there is need for adequate facilities and materials to support teaching and learning. The C.R.E teacher requires learning resources in order to produce good examination results (Nasimiyu, 1997). Similar sentiments were expressed by Goble and Porter (1977) who contended that teachers need in-service training either to remedy deficiencies that they have discovered in their professional skills or develop their potential competence. This is to keep pace with the changing demands of the curriculum.

Oluoch (1982) emphasized the need for in-service training since it helps the teacher to understand the new approaches required to implement innovation. Ondiek (1978) pointed out that teachers should not only take full responsibility of their duties but also should be able to justify what they have taught, why they have taught it and how they have taught it. The teacher should generally understand the nature of his subject and master the content. The mastery of content gives the teacher confidence in what he/she is teaching. And this applies to all subjects including C.R.E. The Christian Religious Education teacher should not only understand the objectives of the subjects but also the life-centred approach. The teacher should have knowledge of the required textbooks and learning materials for C.R.E. as well as knowledge of the pupils in the C.R.E class. The teacher should adequately prepare lessons always intending that students understand, be involved and eventually base their moral decision on Christianity principles. Walaba (1998) recommended that the C.R.E. teacher should continue giving guidance and counselling to students and be a go-between the church, school and parents. The teacher should be a guardian to the learners, inspire and motivate them and be a Christian model to the pupils, society, schools and the nation. The findings also indicate that whereas teachers were good at mastery of the subjects matter, their moral conduct did not endear itself to many.

A research carried out in a Zambian school on the amount of teacher-pupil interaction revealed that long periods of note-taking may be desirable when pupils do not have their own textbooks, but frequently the activity reflects inappropriate training and a lack of imagination on the part of the teacher (Bray et.al 1986). This applies to the teaching of C.R.E which involves a lot of note-taking. The teacher needs to vary the teaching methods and be creative lest the learners lose interest in the subject. The researcher noted that teachers who only lecture find it hard to know whether their pupils understand whatever is being taught and also to keep pupils' attention. Research has shown that an affective climate increases learning in the affective and cognitive domain. The warmth with which a teacher approaches learners appears to have greater effect on them than his academic learning. Learner-centredness is more effective than teacher-centredness in fostering achievement in attitudes towards other persons (Lee, 1973). The C.R.E teacher should be learner-centred in their approach to teaching for better understanding of the concepts being taught.

Research has revealed that many teachers in the United Kingdom had negative attitudes towards Afro-Caribbean pupils and low expectation of their academic performance. As a result, they treated the pupils less favourably in the classroom denying them the educational opportunities enjoyed by their white peers. Many of them consequently experienced low academic achievements. Teachers often make assumptions about their pupils' potential, predicting that some pupils will perform poorly. Research has shown that the teachers' subsequent behaviour may encourage the pupils who have been identified as potentially successful and discourage the ones who have been identified as poor performers. In this way, the initial predictions become self-fulfilling prophecies (Bray, et.al 1986). This study examined if the teacher's influence affects the students' performance.

Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) carried out a similar study to randomly test the intelligence of a group of pupils. They deliberately gave the teachers misleading information on the results of their tests telling them that a few children were exceptionally bright. A year later, they tested the performance of the pupils again and found that most of the pupils they had said were bright had performed significantly better than average even though in reality their original test had not shown to be particularly bright. This means that the teacher gave more attention to these students with the preconceived idea that they were bright. This can be concluded that the teacher has an influence on the student's performance. The teacher's use of praise or sarcasm brings about encouragement or discouragement. Their subsequent actions lead students to be good or bad performers irrespective of the student's actual intelligence and aptitudes.

Rist's (1977) research highlights the need for teachers to check their own behaviour in the classroom. They should not encourage specific students only while discouraging others. The teacher should not expect more from children of particular ethnic groups or social background. They should try as much as possible to avoid discrimination and be fair. This applies to a C.R.E teacher whom the student considers to be a good role model. Discrimination will not only affect the student's attitude towards the subject but also their performance in the same. People's attitudes towards something or someone can be changed through persuasive

communication. A message is often more persuasive when it comes from an expert source and from someone who seems honest and sincere (Camille et. al (1992)). This is relevant to this study in that the teacher can positively influence a student to have a favourable attitude towards C.R.E. It also calls for honesty and trust in the teacher in order to convince the student.

It has often been a general believe that children watched their teachers with obsessive concern and noted mannerisms and subtle changes in mood. This means that teachers who are good at something are appreciated. A C.R.E teacher should realize that teaching C.R.E in itself involves moulding the student's behaviour and therefore they should set a good example to the learners. The teacher's approach in disciplining students should be with caution, love and self-control to avoid creating a negative impact which will affect their attitude and performance in classroom teaching. The teacher's external problems should not affect delivery of content and classroom interaction with the student.

Good and Brophy (1970) concurs with Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) on the teacher's influence on performance. The study indicates how teachers behaved differently with a sample of high achievers than they did with a sample of low achievers. The former were consistently favoured in demands for good performance, lower rates of criticism for wrong answers and in the giving of praise for correct answers. When the teachers were informed about these patterns, they changed their behaviour so that pupils were treated more equally. The behaviour of the low group changed in respect to an improvement in behaviour and achievement.

A study by Nash (1973) compared the performance and behaviour of the pupils with the teacher's evaluation of the same pupils. The conclusion was that the way pupils were perceived by their teachers had a great influence upon their attainment. Where pupils were perceived favourably, they did well and said they liked being with that teacher. In a case where in the situation did not do well, they were in the situation of not being favourably perceived by the teacher and they reported that they did not like being with that teacher. The profile of a particular child's performance thus varied according to their teacher's perception. The implication is that students' performance in a given subject can always change for as long as the teacher develops a positive attitude and interest in the students' performance. This study also investigated if the teacher's influence affects the student's performance.

Ndarwa (2006) in her study on students' and teachers' perceptions of the role of C.R.E. on moral development established that the non-C.R.E. students were negative to C.R.E. because of teachers who discouraged them from taking C.R.E. in favour of Sciences. This shows that teachers have a strong influence on the students' attitude towards C.R.E. She also observed that C.R.E. teachers had failed to be good role models to the students and this also discouraged the students from taking C.R.E. in Form Three. Similar sentiments were expressed by Chesaro (2003) that teachers had failed to set a good example to the students. This calls for a change in behaviour for the C.R.E. teachers in cases where they have failed to be good role models to the students.

IV. Quantifying the Teacher's Influence on Students' Performance in C.R.E

As already noted, studies have shown that the teachers' perception of the pupils has an influence on their performance. When pupils are perceived favourably by the teacher, they do well and like that teacher (Nash, 1973). Conversely, if the pupils perceive their teacher positively, they are also likely to perform well. In order to capture the teachers' influence on performance in C.R.E, the study used questionnaires which consisted of both close and open-ended items. The close ended items had statements each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The responses to various statements representing variables of perception of the teacher and their relation to performance in C.R.E were recorded and generalizations made on the results. In the next section we show the students' performance in C.R.E. in relation to statements regarding their C.R.E. teacher.

4.1 Like the CRE teacher

The statistics here show that 125 students (55.0%) like the C.R.E teacher while 91 students (40.1%) disagreed with the statement. In terms of performance, approximately 54% of the high achievers also expressed a liking for the teacher while in the average bracket, around 63% liked the teacher. The low achievers had a 50-50 distinction between those who agreed with the statement and those who did not. It is notable therefore that the majority of the students who like their teacher performed above average. There is therefore a correlation between performance and the perception of the pupils towards the teacher. However there is also a significant number of students who disagreed with the statement which may suggest that students' performance in C.R.E has nothing to do with the like or dislike for the C.R.E teacher. This is further reflected by High achievers (43.4%) who disagreed with the statement. Without downplaying the significance of the teacher's influence on performance, the logical conclusion from this would be that there are other motivating factors which can make a student to perform well in C.R.E.

4.2 The CRE teacher as a good model

The responses indicate that 86.4% of the respondents were in agreement that their C.R.E teacher is a good role model. The highest percentage of positive response was from the high achievers (95.7%), followed by Average students (86.8%) and lastly low achievers (80%). One can therefore conclude that to some extent the teacher's behaviour influences the student's performance in C.R.E. Consequently, teachers should uphold good behaviour. Rist (1977) observes that teachers need to check their own behaviour in the classroom. They should not encourage specific students only while discouraging others. When a C.R.E teacher treats all the students equally without discrimination, students see a perfect example in the teacher, and in turn it motivates them to have a favourable attitude towards the teacher as well as the subject. This will be reflected in positive academic performance.

4.3. The Teacher's commitment

The teacher's commitment to producing good examination results was highlighted by the response of 182 (80.1%) students implying that most teachers are interested not only in moulding the students' behaviour but also in their good performance in exams. Out of the positive responses, the high achievers recorded the highest score of 85% of the total number of students in this category followed by the average achievers at 80% with the low achievers returning 74%. One can therefore conclude that there is a positive correlation between the learners' perception about the teacher's commitment and performance. In order to improve on such perceptions, teachers should be encouraged to commit themselves to more intensive work in C.R.E by providing them with necessary incentives including modern teaching materials.

V. Gender Influence on Performance in C.R.E

There is a tendency among students to assume that certain subjects are specifically meant for boys while others are meant for girls. This kind of attitude affects the student such that even in subjects which the student can excel, one performs poorly due to the attitude that the student has already formed. A study by Gipps et.al (1994) revealed that one consequence of socialization is that boys and girls develop different attitudes to certain academic disciplines. It is hypothesized that negative attitudes will influence whether students will be able to engage with certain tasks and the subsequent quality of their performance. The prediction is that negative attitudes will result in lower performance. Below we show the students' responses to statements related to gender and how they relate with performance in C.R.E.

5.1 C.R.E is meant for Girls

From the responses it is notable that a significant number of low achievers (99.0%) rejected the idea that C.R.E. is meant for girls compared to the High achievers (87%) and Average performing students (83%). As a whole therefore, students do not consider C.R.E to be a subject for girls as portrayed by the high percentage (92.5%) of students who disagreed with the above statement. It is however surprising that contrary to expectation, the low achievers have a more positive attitude towards gender distinctions in relation to subject choice. This means that their low achievement is likely to be as a result of other factors which need to be identified by stake holders and dealt with in order to improve their general performance in the subject.

5.2 CRE is Important for both Boys and Girls

The responses indicate that many students (96.9%) were in agreement that C.R.E is important for both boys and girls, irrespective of their performance in the subject. This implies that students generally consider C.R.E to be an important subject irrespective of their sex. This concurs with Atkinson (1979) who found out that the sex of a student was not related to their attitudes. It is therefore incumbent upon stake holders to cultivate such a positive attitude for the benefit of the students.

VI. Conclusion

This paper examined how gender based opinions and teachers influence students' attitudes towards Christian Religious Education (henceforth, CRE) in secondary schools in Kenya and how this is reflected in the students' performance in the subject. From the responses of the learners on the influence of the teacher and gender on performance in C.R.E, it was established that teachers were perceived to have the greater influence as shown by a higher percentage of pupils in the high achievers bracket returning positive responses to statements about the teacher such as being a good role model and committed. This means that the more positive the learners' attitude is, the better the performance. On the contrary, gender influence had the least impact as the majority of the learners evenly distributed across the various achievement brackets thought it had no impact on

the choice of C.R.E at all. Such findings call for a change of strategy in the teaching of C.R.E to put more emphasis on the role of the teacher in shaping learner attitudes to maximize performance in the subject.

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