

GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS MATHEMATICS AT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVELS IN HARARE

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There is a national policy in Zimbabwe to address all the issues of gender equity. However in the education field, national statistics still show that more girls than boys drop mathematics, before completing secondary school (Dhliwayo et al 1996). This study investigated the extent to which the attitudes of girls and boys towards mathematics differ at primary (Grade Seven) and secondary (Form Four) school levels in Harare. In his research on gender-related and achievement-related beliefs in mathematics, Risnes (1998) found that boys displayed more positive motivating and achievement-related beliefs girls.

Two primary and two secondary schools were randomly selected in Harare. In each school, one Grade Seven class (primary school) and one Form Four class (secondary school) participated in the study. Two questionnaires were administered to Grade pupils and to Form Four pupils respectively. The questionnaires were used to survey the students' attitudes towards mathematics. The results showed that more Form Four male and Grade Seven female pupils find mathematics enjoyable and interesting than the Form Four female pupils. Similar results were observed about the level of participation in mathematics lessons and not fearing the subject. It was observed that more Form Four boys and Grade Seven girls indicated that they are good at mathematics and denied being poor at mathematics than did their Form Four female counterparts. In another set of results more Form Four male and Grade Seven female pupils claimed that mathematics was their favourite subject than the Form Four female pupils. In contrast fewer Form Four male and Grade Seven pupils indicated that mathematics was their most difficult subject than the Form Four female pupils. In all the cases Grade Seven male and female pupils gave similar responses.

The study concluded that there was evidence that more Form Four male and Grade Seven female pupils have a more positive attitude towards mathematics than the Form Four female pupils. However this difference was not apparent between Grade Seven female and male pupils. My conjecture is that in the Zimbabwean culture, maturation and gender socialisation may contribute to the decline of positive attitude towards mathematics observed in senior girls. For example, girls do more household chores than boys and this may reduce their preparation time for lessons. Further research should investigate this conjecture since it may not be true in other cultures.

Dhliwayo N., Gudza E., Ngaru M. and Kilborn 1996. W. *The state of mathematics education in the Zimbabwean primary schools*, Curriculum Development Unit, Harare.

Risnes M. 1998. *Beliefs about oneself as learner of mathematics. Does gender matter?* in Proceedings of Norma 98, The Second Nordic Conference on Mathematics Education, Agder, pp 223 – 230.