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Age and Gender as Correlates of Refugee Pupils' Acquisition of Tolerance Skill

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Abstract

The issues of violence, war and disaster have been a current thing in the globe. In Africa currently, there are fifteen countries either in war or experiencing post-war conflicts; the after effect of these mostly are women and children. This paper examined the effect of age and gender as correlates

of refugee pupils' acquisition of tolerance skill. A total of 136 pupils aged eight-fifteen years of Oru Refugee camp Ijebu-Ode were participants .67 male and 69 females. The result showed that 4% of the children had healthy tolerance level with 24% having dangerously low tolerance level. Furthermore, out of the 67 males involved in the study, only 12% had high tolerance level. in the case of the females out of 69, 16% had high/moderate tolerance level. Implications of the results were analyzed.

Introduction

The issues of violence, war and disaster have been a current thing in the globe. Some are man-made while some are natural. At times the consequences of these will spill across borders of nations and affect a whole continent. Africa is one of the affected continents hence the issue of conflict or its impact are always dominating her debates. According to the African Sun News (2010), currently there are fifteen countries either involved in war or are experiencing post-war conflicts and tension. Consequently, some people are killed while some lost their loved ones. Some are dislocated and some relocated. Some cross borders and go to other places or countries as refugees. Refugees are those who leave their own country of origin to escape violence, war, disaster and their aftermath. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 defines refugees as

Those who are outside their country of nationality and who are unable or unwilling to return to that country because of well founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group (p.1).

Children are among the most vulnerable groups when families and communities are forced to flee persecution and violence. Such is the case of refugee children. According to UNHCR (2007), refugee children have passed through terrible experiences which nobody, even the least of all children, should ever have to endure. The refugee camp becomes their temporary home while they look forward to the day when they and their families can go back to their countries safely. They no longer have a home or a country as it were. They may be referred to as children whose childhood has been torn away. This is because victims of war may face the difficult process of rebuilding their lives. Some children learn aggressive or violent behaviour which not only negatively affects their own well-being, but also damages their ability to adapt and contribute to a healthy and productive society. According to

Tillman (2001), learning to be and learning to live together are essential if refugees are to live a productive life in a larger society. It has been established that most of the problems of refugee children are psychological (McCloskey and Southwick, 1996). According to them, these problems can persist and are often undetected by adult caretakers. These problems include war – induced trauma, displacement, migration and poverty. Although physicians are well-equipped to treat the various physical ailments of refugee children, some of the most serious problems are likely to be psychological. Recovery from physical deprivation may be more rapid and complete than recovery from emotional trauma and loss.

Children exposed to war can show signs of psychological distress such as regression and withdrawal if they are separated from their parents or if their parents themselves display traumatic stress and clinical levels of anxiety or depression. Kaffman (2001) confirms this by revealing that when parents are killed or are adversely affected, children are especially at risk. Exposure to war, perhaps, can have short term psychological impact on children if their experience is promptly attended to. However, prompt attention might be difficult if they are still exposed to traumatic life experience several years later. Such traumatic experience as identified by McCloskey and Southwick (1996) is their migration experience. This might be because immigration places a variety of pressure on families including economic strain and poverty, homelessness, and family dysfunction. The consequences of this disruption, for children in particular, can be extremely serious (UNHCR, 2002). When a society's guiding and regulating mechanisms are lost, individuals find themselves deprived of their normal social, economic and cultural environment. Parental distress and anxiety may disrupt the normal emotional development of their children.

Children generally need to acquire social skills to function well in adult life. Specifically, refugee children need to acquire social skills not only to function well as adult but to put their life together. Tolerance is not just a feeling; it is a way of behaving. It is a way of accepting and probably living with people of different opinions regardless of their differences. Differences according to Phelps (2002) are important because that is what makes our lives possible. We need differences of opinion in order to learn new things. According to her, many differences are necessary and even the ones that are not necessary often add colour, variety and pleasure to our lives. To accept differences in other people is tolerance. Phelps (2002) stresses further that intolerance arises from somebody's fear and this fear can be expressed in a

number of ways. Such ways include projection, suspicion, put-downs, controlling, blind-spots and mis-education. She states further that learning how to behave tolerantly is a valuable skill that can be acquired through different steps including self-acceptance, self-recognition, empathy, responsibility, and empowerment. Other steps are allowing standing up, respect and seeing goodness.

Learning to be tolerant perhaps begins with learning to be tolerant of oneself. This is because we can not give to others what we can not give to ourselves. It is very important also to recognise one's area of need of growth because all human beings are learning and growing. This will likely help us to become empathetic to and compassionate with other's need. This is very important to refugee pupils in particular because it will help them to take each person and each circumstance as they come. They will also be willing and interested in finding what is best in them and as Phelps (2002) puts it, be prepared to deal with what might be worst.

The skill of tolerance may also be acquired though the process of being aware of all one's feelings. This could be an important step towards being aware of how others feel too. Furthermore, accepting responsibility is a major aspect of the process of acquiring the skill of tolerance. To be tolerant involves the willingness to take responsibility for the outcomes of choices made, taking credit when things go right and learning when things go wrong. We can also increase our tolerance level by learning how to allow different beliefs and opinions even if we do not accept them. Phelps (2002) believes that the best way to learn, especially tolerance skill, is to be open enough to consider other viewpoints whether or not we agree with them. Similarly, Stoffel (2007:2) highlighted ten tips to spread the seed of tolerance. The tips include being an "unpstander", testing one's tolerance level, putting someone else' in one's shoes, visiting other houses of worship, celebrating and honouring other cultural traditions and taking a walk in a different neighbourhood. Other tips are experiencing another culture's arts and entertainment, listening, travelling and educating oneself and one's children about how to accept differences. The acquisition of this skill is relevant to refugee pupils because their level of tolerance will likely determine their peaceful living since they are from different countries, with different culture and background. Tolerance is a skill that perhaps brings the human family together.

A set of pupil variable that could explain a large proportion of variance in refugee pupils' acquisition of the skill of tolerance is age. Researchers have worked on the effect of age and pupils acquisition of skills, language proficiency and adjustment of migrant children among others (Ekstrand, 1976; Cumis 1981; Cumis, 1988). This is crucial because children in Refugee Primary School Oru-Ijebu, Nigeria are of different ages. Some have stopped schooling for some time in their home countries because of war and violence. Whenever they arrive in the camp, they are to continue their education from where they stopped.

Another variable of interest is gender because children in the camp comprises of both males and females. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) found girls to be generally superior verbal concept learning than boys. Akinboye (1999) found out that gender has no significant difference on pupils' achievement in social studies. Harker (2000) also investigated gender differences in achievement of boys and girls in schools in New Zealand. The study revealed that the achievement in English language was significantly higher than that of boys in terms of mean, curriculum coverage and examination learning outcomes. The inconsistencies in these studies therefore call for further studies on the effect of age and gender particularly on refugee pupils' acquisition of tolerance skill.

Research Questions

1. Is there any difference among the performance of the different age groups on the tolerance scale?
2. Is there any difference between the performance of male and female on the tolerance scale?

Participants/Population

The pupils of Refugee Primary School, Oru Camp constituted the population for the study. A total enumeration procedure was adopted and used to include all the pupils in primary classes three to six. In all 136 pupils took part in the study.

Research Instrument and Validation

One instrument was designed and used in the study. Pupils' Tolerance Acquisition Scale was designed to cover the five broad where children's "seed of tolerance" can be measured based in Shoffel (2007)'s suggestion.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Distribution of Pupils according to Age/Gender

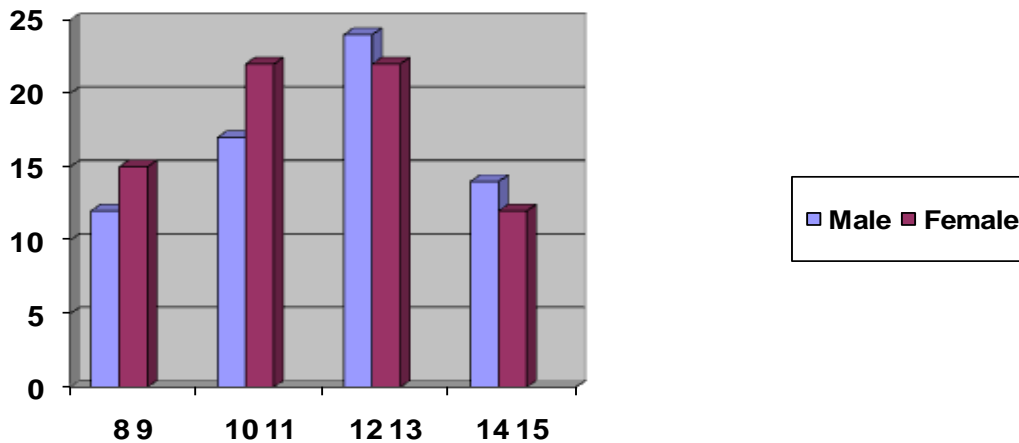
AgeRange	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	Total	Percentage
Male	12	17	24	14	67	49.3
Female	15	22	22	12	69	50.7
Total	25	39	46	26	136	100

Table 2: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition According to Age

	Tolerance	AgeRange								Total	Percentage
		8-9		10-11		12-13		14-15			
		No. of Pupils	%	No. of Pupils	%	No. of Pupils	%	No. of Pupils	%		
Score	Below 40	6	24	5	13	7	15	9	35	27	20
	40-59	10	40	11	28	11	24	9	35	41	30
	60-79	8	32	12	31	16	35	6	23	42	31
	80-100	1	4	11	28	12	26	2	7	26	19
	Total	25	100	39	100	46	100	26	100	136	100

From Table 1 and Figure 1, it is revealed that there are 12 males and 15 females who are between 8 and 9 years old, 17 males and 22 females are 10-11 years old while 24 males and 12 females are between 14-15 years old; 14 males and 12 females are between the age range of 14-15 years.

Fig 1: Distribution of Pupils according to Age/Gender



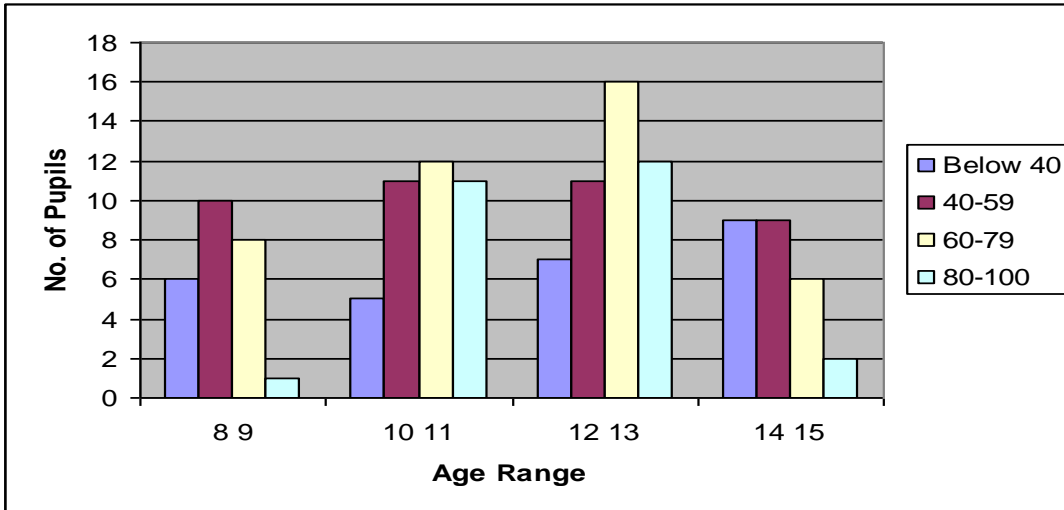


Figure 2: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition According to Age

From table 2 and figure 2, it is revealed that 25 pupils are between 8 and 9 years old. From this group, 6 (24%) scored below 40, 10 representing 40% scored between 40-59 marks, 8 (32%) scored between 60-79 mark while 1 (4%) scored between 80 and 100 marks. This means that 24% have dangerously low tolerance level, 40% have low tolerance level, 32% have moderate tolerance level while 4% have healthy/high tolerance level.

Also, pupils of 10-11 years age range are 39. Out of this number, 5(13%) scored below 40, 11 (28%) scored between 40 and 59, 12 (31%) scored between 60-79 and 11(28%) scored between 80 and 100. This implies that 13% have dangerously low tolerance level, 28% have low tolerance level, 31% have moderate tolerance level while 28% have high tolerance level. In sum, 59% of this group had either moderate or high tolerance level. The tolerance level of this group is better than that of 8-9 years old group. This might be because they have stayed longer in the camp for a longer period and they have adjusted relatively to the system. The next group who are between 12-13 years old are 46. From this group, 7(15%) scored below 40, 11(24%) scored between 40 and 59, 16(35%) scored between 80 and 100. The oldest pupils who were between 14-15 years old are 26.

This finding shows that 15% have dangerously low tolerance level, 24% have low tolerance level while 35% and 26% have moderate or high tolerance level respectively. The oldest group who were between 14-15 years old are 26. Scores from the tolerance scale reveal that 9(35%) scored below 40, another 9(35%) scored between 40 and 59, 6(23%) scored between 60-79 and 2(7%) scored between 80 and 100. In sum, 70% have low tolerance level while 30% have moderate or high tolerance level. This is contrary to expectation. One would have thought that with their years of experience in the system, they ought to have acquired high level of tolerance. Most of the pupils of this age range are in the terminal class. They may not have enough tolerance level out of the fear of future. This is possible because in the camp (Oru Camp), there is no secondary school. A child will have to go out of the camp to attend a secondary school in the neighbourhood if he/she so desire.

Table 3: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition According to Gender

Scores	Gender			
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Below 40	16	24	11	16
40-59	25	37	16	23
60-79	18	27	24	35
80-100	8	12	18	26
Total	67	100	69	100

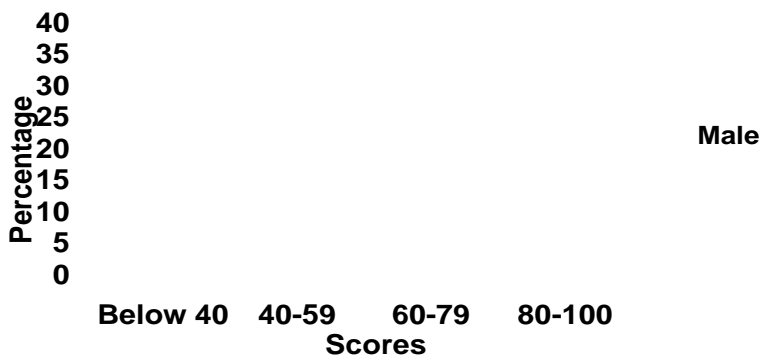


Fig. 3a: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition According to Gender

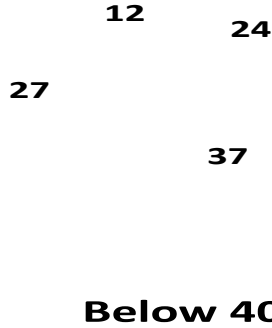


Fig. 3b: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition (Male)

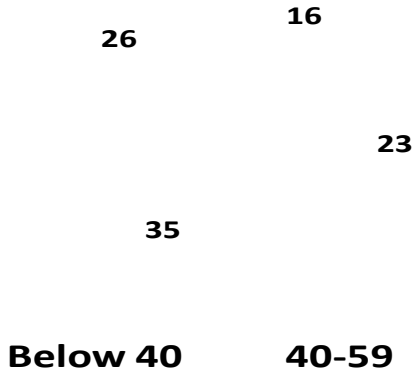


Fig. 3c: Pupils Tolerance Acquisition (Female)

Table 3 and Figures 3a, b and c reveal that out of the 67 males that participated in the study, 16(24%) scored below 40, 25(37%) scored between 40 and 59, 18(27%) scored between 60 and 79 and 8(12) scored between 80 and 100 on the Pupils Tolerance Acquisition scale. It means that 24% have dangerously low tolerance level, 27% and 12% have moderate and high tolerance level respectively. In all, only 37% of the males have adequate tolerance level. This may be due to the fact that male children are exposed to situations or circumstances that affect their tolerance level negatively. They may need to help their fathers in farming and in some cases may have to farm on their own to provide for; themselves and perhaps for other member of the family. Also 69 females participated in the study. Out of this number, 11(16%) scored below 40%; 16(23%) scored between 60 and 79% while 18(26%) scored between 80 and 100 % on the Pupils Tolerance Acquisition scale. This implies that 16% females have dangerously low tolerance level, 40% and 23% have average tolerance level. This percentage is low and it may be due to the fact that females are very sensitive and easily offended.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers of refugee children should be very tolerant especially in the teaching-learning process having being established that only few of them have healthy tolerance level.
2. All stakeholders in the preparation training of teachers should equip them with various methods of dealing with intolerance pupils so that such pupils will be able to cope with teaching and learning and acquisition of life skills such as tolerance skill.

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