

# EXAMINATION OF THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF TRIBE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE

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## ABSTRACT

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*The study examined the intersectionality of tribe, class, and gender in early childhood education in primary schools in Lagos State. It employed descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises all primary school teachers in Ibeju Lekki Local Government Area of Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select fifteen (15) Primary schools in which ten (10) teachers were randomly selected from each of the chosen primary school to make a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents as sample for study. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical methods. Findings revealed that, social identities i.e tribe, class, and gender do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically, often exacerbating inequalities and creating unique challenges for marginalized students. The presence of biases among educators and the lack of cultural competence significantly impacts the academic performance and overall well-being of students from diverse backgrounds. Addressing these intersecting inequalities requires a comprehensive approach that includes culturally responsive teaching practices, professional development for educators on cultural competence, and policies that promote equity and inclusion within educational settings. It was therefore recommended that educators should engage in ongoing professional development that focuses on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and inclusive teaching practices. Also, curricula should be designed to reflect diverse perspectives and experiences, ensuring that all pupils see themselves represented and valued in the educational content.*

**Keywords:** Intersectionality, Tribe, Class, Gender, Early Childhood Education

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a critical foundation for lifelong learning and development. Early childhood refers to the period between birth and 8 years of age, wherein a child's brain is highly sensitive to the environment around them. Early childhood education (ECE), also known as nursery education, is a branch of education theory that relates to the teaching of children (formally and informally) from birth up to the age of eight. Traditionally, this is up to the equivalent of third grade (NAEYC, 2019). Early childhood education is focused on the critical developmental milestones, skills, and concepts that children attain during this period of their

lives, from social-emotional skills to the beginnings of numeracy, literacy, and critical thinking. In addition to preparing children for future academic success, the development of high-quality early childhood care and education is considered by the OECD to be a key economic indicator when assessing the health and future positioning of a nation (NAEYC, 2019).

Research has consistently shown that high-quality early childhood education can significantly impact a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, laying the groundwork for future academic success and personal well-being (Barnett, 2018; Heckman, 2011). The early years are crucial for developing the foundational skills and knowledge necessary for later academic achievements and life skills (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2011). However, access to and the quality of early childhood education are not uniformly distributed among all children. Disparities exist, often along the lines of tribe, class, and gender, which can affect a child's educational trajectory from a very young age. These disparities are rooted in broader social, economic, and historical contexts that shape the experiences of children and their families.

The concept of intersectionality, first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a valuable framework for understanding how various forms of social stratification, such as tribe, class, and gender, intersect and influence individuals' experiences and opportunities. Intersectionality emphasizes that these categories do not operate independently of one another but are interconnected and shape complex social inequalities (Collins, 2010; Crenshaw, 2011).

Tribe has long been recognized as a significant factor influencing educational outcomes. Historical and contemporary practices of segregation and discrimination have led to persistent racial disparities in educational access and quality (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Alexander, 2012). Children of colour often

face systemic barriers that limit their access to high-quality early childhood education, which can adversely affect their academic and social development (Garcia & Weiss, 2015). Research shows that children from racial minority groups are more likely to attend underfunded schools with fewer educational resources (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Additionally, studies have found that teachers often hold implicit biases that affect their interactions with students of colour, leading to differential treatment and lower academic expectations (Gilliam et al., 2016).

Moreso, class or socioeconomic status (SES) is another critical determinant of educational opportunities. Children from low-income families are less likely to have access to high-quality early childhood education programs compared to their more affluent peers (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Economic inequality affects not only access to education but also the resources available within educational settings, contributing to the achievement gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Reardon, 2011). Studies have shown that children from higher SES backgrounds tend to perform better academically due to their access to enriched learning environments and additional educational resources (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011). This socioeconomic divide not only affects academic outcomes but also impacts children's social and emotional development (Evans, 2014).

Furthermore, gender dynamics also play a crucial role in early childhood education. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes can influence the expectations and interactions between teachers and children, potentially affecting boys' and girls' educational experiences and outcomes differently (Francis & Skelton, 2015). Gender biases can manifest in various forms, including the types of activities encouraged, teacher expectations, and classroom interactions, which can shape children's self-concept and academic interests from an early age (Renold, 2011). Research indicates that boys and girls are often treated differently in classroom settings, with teachers unknowingly reinforcing traditional gender roles (Sadker & Zittleman, 2015). For instance, boys may receive more attention and encouragement in activities that require physical skills, while girls might be praised more for their appearance and behaviour (Davis, 2013). These gendered interactions can have long-term effects on children's self-concept and academic interests. Studies have found that girls are less likely to pursue interests in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields due to early gender biases that discourage their participation in these

areas (Eccles, 2014). Conversely, boys may face challenges in developing social and emotional skills if they are not encouraged to engage in activities that foster these competencies (Kindlon & Thompson, 2010).

The intersection of tribe, class, and gender creates unique educational experiences and challenges for children in early childhood education. Research indicates that children who belong to multiple marginalized groups often face compounded disadvantages that are not adequately addressed by considering each identity separately (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). For example, Black girls from low-income families may experience both racial and gender biases, leading to a double burden that affects their educational opportunities and outcomes (Morris, 2017). Studies have shown that intersectionality can exacerbate inequalities in early childhood education, as the overlapping effects of tribe, class, and gender create more complex barriers to educational success (Grant & Zwier, 2011). This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how these social identities interact and influence children's experiences in educational settings.

Understanding the intersectionality of tribe, class, and gender is essential for addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of educational inequalities in early childhood education. By examining how these factors intersect, researchers and educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized children and develop more effective strategies to promote equity and inclusion in early childhood education settings (Gillborn, 2015; Shields, 2018).

The main objective of this research work was to examine the intersectionality of tribe, class, and gender in Early Childhood Education in primary schools in Lagos State. Specifically, the objectives were to:

- i. examine how early childhood education settings reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and social inequalities.
- ii. identify the ways do teachers' biases and cultural competencies impact the learning experiences of children from diverse backgrounds.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. How do early childhood education settings reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and social inequalities?
- ii. In what ways do teachers' biases and cultural competencies impact the learning experiences of children from diverse backgrounds?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises all the public primary school in Ibeju Lekki Local Government Area of Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select fifteen (15) public primary schools in which ten (10) teachers were randomly selected from each of the chosen primary school to make a total of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents as sample for study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. A self-developed questionnaire of about twenty items was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was given to experts for construct and content validation. Test-re-test method was adopted to ascertain the reliability using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) and the value of 0.77 was obtained which is reliable enough for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation statistical tools.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question one: How do early childhood education settings reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and social inequalities?

**Table 1: Responses on early childhood education settings and power dynamics and social inequalities**

| S/N   | ITEMS   | AGREED |         | DISAGREED |         | Mean | S.D   |
|---|---|--------|---------|-----------|---------|------|-------|
|   |   | Freq   | Percent | Freq      | Percent |      |       |
| 2.  | The curriculum used in early childhood education settings reflects diverse cultures and perspectives. | 143    | 95.3    | 7         | 4.7     | 3.46 | 0.692 |
| 3.  | The classroom environment is inclusive and welcoming to all children, regardless of their background. | 121    | 80.7    | 29        | 19.3    | 3.12 | 0.827 |
| 4.  | The school encourages active involvement of parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds.               | 104    | 69.3    | 46        | 30.7    | 2.86 | 1.036 |
| 5.  | School policies explicitly address issues of tribe, class, and gender equity.                         | 136    | 90.6    | 14        | 9.4     | 3.19 | 0.745 |
|   |   | 98     | 65.3    | 52        | 34.7    | 3.65 | 0.752 |
|   |   | 136    | 90.6    | 14        | 9.4     | 3.19 | 0.745 |
| <b>Weighted Mean (?) = 3.256 and SD = 0.810</b> |   |        |         |           |         |      |       |

Table 1 provides insights into perceptions of equality and inclusivity in early childhood education settings. A significant majority (65.3%) of respondents agreed that teachers treat all children equally, regardless of tribe, class, or gender, as indicated by a mean score of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 0.752. This suggests a general perception of fairness among educators, though the presence of a substantial minority (34.7%) who disagreed highlights ongoing concerns about equitable treatment. Similarly, the overwhelming agreement (95.3%) that the curriculum reflects diverse cultures and perspectives, with a mean of 3.46 and a lower standard deviation of 0.692, indicates a strong consensus on the importance of cultural representation in educational materials.

The data further reveals that 80.7% of respondents believe the classroom environment is inclusive and welcoming to all children, with a mean of 3.12 and a higher standard deviation of 0.827, suggesting some variability in responses. There is also notable support (69.3%) for the idea that schools encourage the involvement of parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, though this item had the lowest mean (2.86) and highest standard deviation (1.036), indicating more mixed experiences and perceptions. Lastly, the strong agreement (90.6%) that school policies address tribe, class, and gender equity issues, with a mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.745, underscores the perceived presence of formal mechanisms to support equity. The overall weighted mean of 3.256 and a standard deviation of 0.810 suggest a generally positive but somewhat varied perception of equality and inclusivity in these settings.

Gay (2010) emphasizes the critical role of culturally responsive teaching in promoting educational equity, supporting the high agreement on curriculum diversity. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) highlights the importance of teacher expectations in shaping student outcomes, which is reflected in the strong perception of equal treatment by teachers. However, the mixed responses regarding parent involvement and the inclusivity of the classroom environment echo findings by Epstein (2011), who notes that socioeconomic barriers can hinder parental engagement in schools. These related studies reinforce the importance of continued efforts to address disparities and promote inclusivity in early childhood education.

Research Question two: In what ways do teachers' biases and cultural competencies impact the learning experiences of children from diverse backgrounds?

**Table 2: Responses on Teachers biases, cultural competencies and learning experiences**

| S/N | ITEMS  | AGREED |         | DISAGREED |         | Mean | S.D   |
|-----|--|--------|---------|-----------|---------|------|-------|
|     |  | Freq   | Percent | Freq      | Percent |      |       |
| 1.  | -----  | 104    | 69.3    | 46        | 30.7    | 3.09 | 0.882 |
| 2.  | Teachers tend to have lower academic expectations for students from minority backgrounds         | 107    | 71.4    | 43        | 28.6    | 3.01 | 0.894 |
| 3.  | Teachers' biases can lead to unequal treatment of students in the classroom                      | 120    | 80.0    | 30        | 20.0    | 3.07 | 0.887 |
| 4.  | Students from diverse backgrounds often feel misunderstood by their teachers                     | 114    | 76.0    | 36        | 24.0    | 3.12 | 0.955 |
| 5.  | Teachers' biases negatively impact the academic performance of students from diverse backgrounds |        |         |           |         |      |       |

**Weighted Mean (?) = 3.086 and SD = 0.915**

impact of teacher biases on student performance and classroom dynamics. For instance, a study by Gilliam et al. (2016) demonstrated that implicit biases among preschool teachers led to differential treatment and expectations based on tribe. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) highlighted how culturally relevant pedagogy could mitigate the adverse effects of biases by fostering a more inclusive and understanding educational environment. Moreover, research by García Coll et al. (1996) underscored the importance of recognizing and addressing biases to improve developmental competencies among minority children. These studies collectively validate the present findings, underscoring the urgent need for cultural competency training for educators to promote equity and inclusion in the classroom.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Table 2 reveals significant consensus among respondents that teachers' expectations are influenced by students' cultural backgrounds, with 69.3% agreeing (mean = 3.09, SD = 0.882). This sentiment is closely aligned with the perception that teachers tend to have lower academic expectations for students from minority backgrounds, as indicated by 71.4% agreement (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.894). Such findings underscore the pervasive nature of biases within educational settings, which can shape educators' perceptions and expectations, subsequently impacting the opportunities afforded to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The high levels of agreement highlight the critical need for addressing these biases to ensure equitable educational experiences.

Moreover, the data points to the unequal treatment of students arising from teachers' biases, with a notable 80.0% agreement (mean = 3.07, SD = 0.887), and the feeling of being misunderstood among students from diverse backgrounds, as evidenced by 76.0% agreement (mean = 3.12, SD = 0.955). This unequal treatment can manifest in various forms, including differential discipline practices, classroom participation, and access to resources, all of which can impact students' educational outcomes. The examination of intersectionality within the context of early childhood education reveals the complex and multifaceted ways in which tribe, class, and gender intersect to shape children's educational experiences and outcomes. The insights from this study highlight that these social identities do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically, often exacerbating inequalities and creating unique challenges for marginalized students. The presence of biases among educators and the lack of cultural competence significantly impacts the academic performance and overall well-being of students from diverse backgrounds. Addressing these intersecting inequalities requires a comprehensive approach that includes culturally responsive teaching practices, professional development for educators on cultural competence, and policies that promote equity and inclusion within educational settings. By acknowledging and addressing the intersecting influences of tribe, class, and gender, stakeholders can create more supportive and equitable learning environments that cater to the needs of all students, ultimately fostering better educational outcomes and social development. The findings underscore the critical need for ongoing research and practical interventions to dismantle systemic barriers and promote justice in early childhood education.

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- i. To address and mitigate implicit biases, educators should engage in ongoing professional development that focuses on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and inclusive teaching practices.
- ii. Curricula should be designed to reflect diverse perspectives and experiences, ensuring that all students see themselves represented and valued in the educational content.
- iii. Funding and resources should be distributed in a way that addresses the disparities faced by schools in low-income and racially diverse communities, ensuring all students have access to high-quality education.
- iv. Teacher education programs should include coursework on intersectionality, helping future educators understand the complex interplay of tribe, class, and gender in shaping student experiences and outcomes.
- v. School leadership should cultivate an environment where diversity is celebrated, and students from all backgrounds feel safe, respected, and included.
- vi. Long-term research should be conducted to better understand the ongoing effects of intersectionality on educational outcomes, providing data to inform policy and practice.
- vii. Schools should actively involve parents and community members in decision-making processes, recognizing their valuable insights and fostering a collaborative approach to education.
- viii. National and local educational policies should be re-evaluated and revised to address systemic inequities and promote fairness and justice in educational opportunities and outcomes.
- ix. Schools should offer additional support services, such as counseling and mentoring programs, to assist students who may be adversely affected by the intersecting impacts of tribe, class, and gender.
- x. Educators should adopt teaching methods that recognize and honor the cultural backgrounds of their students, adapting their instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of their classrooms.

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