

ABSTRACT

The Influence of Students' Perceptions of Their Learning Styles on Academic Achievement in Selected Co-Educational Secondary Schools in Barbados

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The purpose of this case study was to bring empirical data to bear on the discussion on the differential performance of boys and girls in co-educational secondary schools in Barbados through an examination of the influence of perceptions of their learning styles on academic achievement. In addition, the study sought to discover whether the students' perceived learning-style preferences differed according to the type of school, the students' sex and socio-economic status as indicated by parental occupation. The students were also required to explain whether they perceived that their sex influenced the way they learn and whether teaching styles affected their academic performance. The study further examined the perceptions of a selected number of teachers about their teaching styles and the influence of the students' sex on their teaching styles.

The setting for this investigation was three co-educational secondary schools in Barbados. On account of the ranking of Barbadian secondary schools, each school had a different academic profile. A non-random sample of fourth year students was selected to participate in this study. The sample comprised 86 girls and 59 boys.

Several qualitative approaches were used for the collection of data. The students in the sample were required to complete a Learning Style Assessment (LSA) Questionnaire in which they stated their perceptions of their learning preferences. In a researcher-designed Students Questionnaire, the students submitted their personal data and responded to a number of questions about their views on the influence of their sex and teaching styles on their academic performance. Focus group interviews were also conducted. Descriptive statistics using percentage results, frequency counts and general trends in the responses were used to analyse the data.

One major finding of this study showed that there were learning-style differences between girls and boys in 13 out of 49 learning-style elements. Another important finding was that 83% of the girls across the three schools, 76% of the male high achievers, 72% of the male low achievers and 64% of the male average achievers stated they were highly motivated to learn. Additionally, the widest variation in the sex-differentiated learning preferences was found between the male and female low achievers. One unexpected finding was that regardless of the students' academic achievement levels and socio-economic status, there were

no strong preferences for learning by listening and reading. Generally, the students felt that teaching styles affected their academic performance more than their sex did.

These findings questioned certain assumptions about how students learn. Based on the findings, students' perceptions of learning-style differences between boys and girls were not wide spread. Secondly, the finding which indicated low preferences for learning by reading and listening have implications for teaching methodologies that may not now be addressing students' diverse learning needs. Future research using a random sample should be conducted to determine the extent to which the results of this study represent the learning-style perceptions of other secondary schools students in Barbados.

Key words: Wendy M. Griffith-Watson; Academic achievement/performance; Academic underachievement/underperformance; Gender; Learning style.