

INFLUENCE OF SEXISM ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MALUMFASHI EDUCATION ZONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE, KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA

¹Saminu Usman

Email: saminukanwa2704@gmail.com

Mobile Phone Number: 08149225782

²Dr. Adekunle Thomas Olutola

Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling

³Dr. Kabir Saidu Abdullahi

^{1&3} Federal University Dutsin-Ma

College of Education

Faculty of Educational Foundations

Department of Arts and Social Science Education

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of perceived sexism on the performance of senior secondary II students in English Language in Malumfashi Education Zonal Quality Assurance, Katsina State, Nigeria. The study was guided by one research question and one null hypothesis. A survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 14,089 senior secondary II students in 28 public secondary schools, from which a sample of 378 students was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the English Language Achievement Test (ELAT) and a Perceived Sexism Scale (PSS). The instruments were subjected to expert validation, while reliability coefficients of 0.768 for ELAT and 0.747 for PSS were obtained using Cronbach's alpha, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that students with low perceived sexism recorded the highest mean score ($M = 6.92$, $SD = 1.60$), followed by those with high perceived sexism ($M = 6.88$, $SD = 1.81$), while students with moderate perceived sexism recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 2.04$). The ANOVA result revealed a statistically significant difference in students' performance across the three levels of perceived sexism, $f(2, 375) = 4.44$, $p = .012$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study concluded that perceived sexism is significantly associated with differences in students' performance, although the relationship was not linear across the three levels of perceived sexism. The study recommends the adoption of gender-equitable classroom practices, gender-sensitive teacher training, equitable participation and feedback opportunities, and mechanisms for identifying and addressing perceived gender bias in schools.

Keywords: Influence, Sexism, Students' Performance, English Language, Senior Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Education in Nigeria is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education whereby one of the aims of the ministry is to guarantee quality system in the country. Schools whether public or private have a number of stakeholders undertaking certain activities. English Language occupies a central position in the Nigerian educational system. It is the official language of instruction

from the upper basic level through tertiary education, the language of government business, and the language in which candidates must obtain a credit pass, alongside Mathematics, before they can be considered for admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria (Sabine, Gelwick, & Carter, 2024).

There are many factors, which account for the good or poor academic performance in secondary schools like; the quality of students admitted, the type of scholastic materials available in the school and home environment, the methods of teaching, the nature of administration and teachers involvement in academic matters. However, it seems that the most important factor to the academic performance of students is the impact of sex differences on students; academic matters (Ita, 2023).

In the same way, academic performance in secondary schools is a concern of all people who have invested interest in schools. This category may include teachers, parents, administrators, proprietors and the public. Regarding performance discrepancies of boys and girls, Megary (2021) concluded that once out of the primary school environment, Females under achieve in a variety of subjects. The reason why this occurs has to be answered. This is in order to get a clear picture of situation from the Nigerian perspective; research on this topic is of paramount importance. Attempts will be made to identify the conditions presumed to be responsible for the differential performance of boys and girls as claimed by the teachers and some researchers (Megary, 2021).

It is obvious that inspirations ginger actions, counteractions and their directions. Therefore, a number of factors motivated this study. The first of such factors is related to sexism in education. Thus, the educational growth and development especially in the northern part of Nigeria, is suffering from the problem of educational inequity between females and males in terms of educational opportunities. According to Nwoko (2021), sexism in education is reflected in the low enrollment of girls, high withdrawal and dropout rates that contribute to poor completion rates, limited parental support for girls' education, and gender-biased classroom interactions. Female students, particularly in co-educational settings, often receive less attention and academic support from teachers, especially male teachers, compared with their male counterparts.

Another motivating factor for undertaking this study is the assertion that females have better aptitude and competence in learning language than their male counterparts. Closely related to this assertion is the desire to investigate and evolve a means of improving the poor performance of students across gender in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE), conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC, 2022) and the National Examinations Council (NECO, 2022) through empirical studies of this type. This is more desirous due to the availability of studies, especially outside the shores of Nigeria, which indicate that both female and male students perform better when they are separated wherever the former takes more advantage than the later (Afolayan, 2022 & Adegboye, 2021).

Sexism is generally understood as stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination based on an individual's sex or gender (Chan, 2022). In educational settings, sexism manifests through teachers' differential expectations of male and female students, unequal allocation of classroom attention and talk-time, gender-biased curricular materials, and peer-level stereotyping about which sex is presumed to be naturally better suited to particular subjects or skills (Maigari, & Balarabe, 2023). In the context of the study, the concept of sexism is critical for understanding how gender biases can affect educational outcomes, particularly in language performance.

One of the primary ways sexism manifests is through gender stereotypes that dictate what behaviors, abilities, and roles are deemed appropriate for males and females. In educational settings, these stereotypes can influence teachers' expectations and students' self-perceptions (Rice, 2021). The study explores whether such stereotypes affect students' confidence and willingness to engage with English language tasks, resulting in differing performance levels based on gender. The materials used in English language instruction can reflect and perpetuate sexist ideas. Textbooks and reading materials may contain gender biases, portraying male characters as more competent or authoritative, while female characters may be depicted in stereotypical roles (Gradoll & Swann, 2021). The study examines how the presence of such sexist content can influence students' attitudes towards the subject and their engagement with the material, potentially hindering performance.

Sexism can also operate within classroom interactions. For example, if teachers unconsciously favour male students in participation or if students internalize sexist attitudes from peers, it can create an environment where female students feel less capable or less encouraged to express their thoughts in English (Limam, 2021). The study investigates how these dynamics manifest in classroom settings and their impact on students' performance in language assessments. English language in the context of this study, serves as a crucial medium of communication and academic expression, particularly in the context of Nigeria education system. In the study the concept of English language encompasses various dimensions that influence both teaching and learning processes. Understanding this concept is essential for analysing how sexism may impact students' performance in different aspects of the language (Maccoby, 2023; Al-Mously, Salem, & Al-Hamdan, 2015).

English Language occupies a central position in Nigeria's educational system because it serves as both a compulsory school subject and the official medium of instruction at the upper primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. According to the National Policy on Education, English is the language of instruction beyond the early years of primary education, making proficiency in the language indispensable for effective learning across all subject areas (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2014). Consequently, students' academic success depends largely on their ability to communicate effectively in English, since classroom instruction, textbooks, examinations, and most academic interactions are conducted in the language. Beyond its educational role, English serves as Nigeria's official language and the principal lingua franca among the country's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. Nigeria is home to more than 500

indigenous languages, making English the most practical means of facilitating communication, national integration, governance, commerce, science, technology, and international relations (Karthigeyan, & Nirmala, 2022). Its widespread use has made competence in English an essential requirement for educational attainment, employment opportunities, and participation in the global knowledge economy (Yusuf, 2022).

Performance is generally used in Education. Industry, civil service, clinical purposes and also for guidance & counselling for various significant activities like; assignment of grades, promotion to next class, classification of individuals, counselling & remedial teaching, vocation guidance, measuring the effectiveness of learning Situations, and selection of individuals (Aneta Pavlenko, 2021 & Blot, 2022). Academic performance of students gives educational and vocational institutions the opportunity to determine whether the educational curriculum is having the desired impact on students in terms of teaching and learning. It also gives some indication of how well teachers and students have accomplished their targeted educational goals (Arshad, Zaidi, & Mahmood, 2025). Narad, & Abdullah, 204) define academic performance as an evaluation of the knowledge students have acquired at school over a certain period of time. According to Chilca (2023) it is the level of knowledge acquired in a subject area and it is usually measured by grades obtained after an assessment.

Academic performance is generally been considered as a key criterion to judge one's total potentiality and capability in educational system, it occupies a very important place in the learning process. Crowder (2024 & Enya, 2025), defined Academic Performance as the “extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning i.e., achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him”. Academic performance also denotes the knowledge attained and skill developed in the school subject, usually designated by test scores (Lawan, Musa, & Bello, 2024). Academic Performance influence the student's concept by telling him how other judges him and how rates himself in relation to others. They also affect the amount of time and energy he can spend on social activities and this will how sociable he becomes. Symons (2020) indicated many ways in which academic performance is influenced. He reports that marks earned in the examination make a tremendous difference to a student.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent poor performance of senior secondary school students in English Language has remained a major concern among educators, policymakers, parents, and examination bodies in Nigeria. English Language is not only a compulsory subject but also the medium of instruction for virtually all subjects at the secondary and tertiary levels. Consequently, poor achievement in English adversely affects students' overall academic performance and limits their educational and career opportunities. Several scholars have attributed students' poor performance in English to factors such as inadequate instructional materials, ineffective teaching methods, poor learning environments, low motivation, teacher quality, and socio-cultural influences.

Among the socio-cultural factors receiving increasing scholarly attention is sexism in education. Gender stereotypes and discriminatory classroom practices may undermine students' academic confidence, participation, and self-efficacy, particularly when one gender is consistently favoured over the other during classroom interactions. Gender bias in schools can create unequal learning opportunities, reduce students' engagement, and negatively influence learning outcomes. Such inequalities may ultimately affect students' academic achievement across different subject areas, including English Language. In addition, societal perceptions regarding gender-appropriate academic disciplines continue to shape students' educational experiences. Research has shown that gender stereotypes may influence students' subject preferences, classroom participation and academic aspirations, thereby affecting their learning outcomes across different fields of study. Such perceptions may equally influence students' attitudes towards English Language and their performance in both arts- and science-oriented schools.

It is against this background that this study investigates the influence of sexism on senior secondary school students' performance in English Language in Malumfashi Education Zonal Quality Assurance, Katsina State, with the aim of providing empirical evidence that could assist educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers in promoting gender-equitable learning environments and improving students' academic performance in English Language.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by the objective to:

1. Find out differences in students' performance in grammar across levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State.

Research Question

The study answered the following research question:

1. What differences exist in students' performance in grammar across levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State?

Hypothesis

The tested the following null hypotheses:

H_{01} : There is no significant difference in students' performance in grammar scores across levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State.

Methodology

The study adopts a survey research design for this study. It is a quantitative approach that involves collecting standardized data from a defined sample through structured instruments, thereby enabling the description, comparison, and generalization of findings to the larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was considered appropriate because it allows the systematic examination of how perceived sexism influences students' performance in English Language without manipulating existing school or classroom conditions. The target population of the study is made up of fourteen thousand and eighty-nine (14,089) Senior Secondary II students used as the participants. The participants were drawn from all the twenty-

eight (28) Public Secondary Schools in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State. The sample size of this study consists of 378 Senior Secondary II students in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State, determined using Research Advisor (2006) at a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5%. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure adequate representation of male and female students as well as school location. The instrument used for data collection in this study was titled the “English Language Achievement Test (ELAT)”. To establish validity, the instrument was subjected to expert review. Specifically, two specialists in English language education and one expert in measurement and evaluation department of educational psychology and counselling, faculty of education, federal university, Dutsin-Ma to evaluate the contents of the instruments, scrutinized them and make necessary corrections and modifications to ascertain their appropriateness and content coverage with reference to the research objectives. The instrument's reliability was determined through a pilot study involving 40 Senior Secondary II students purposively selected from two public senior secondary schools within the Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance zone, Katsina State, that are not part of the main study. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability coefficients were calculated as 0.768 for ELAT and 0.747 for PSS, demonstrating good internal consistency. The data collected was analyzed using inferential statistical (mean and standard deviation) to answer all the research question relating to students’ performance in English Language and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test hypothesis.

Results

Research Question 1: What differences exist in students’ performance in grammar across levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students’ Grammar Scores across Levels of Perceived Sexism

Level of Perceived Sexism	N	Mean	SD
Low Sexism	131	6.92	1.60
Moderate Sexism	121	6.31	2.04
High Sexism	126	6.88	1.81
Total	378	6.71	1.84

Table 1 shows that students with low perceived sexism obtained the highest mean grammar score of 6.92 (SD = 1.60), followed by students with high perceived sexism, who obtained a mean score of 6.88 (SD = 1.81). Students with moderate perceived sexism recorded the lowest mean grammar score of 6.31 (SD = 2.04). The mean scores indicate observable differences in grammar performance across the three levels of perceived sexism, with the low-sexism group recording the highest mean and the moderate-sexism group recording the lowest.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in students' performance in grammar scores across levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State.

Table 2: One-Way Analysis of Variance of Students' Grammar Scores across Levels of Perceived Sexism

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig (p-value)
Between Groups	29.432	2	14.716		
Within Groups	1244.137	375	3.318	4.436	.012
Total	1273.569	377			

Table 2 revealed a statistically significant difference in Grammar scores among the three groups, $F(2, 375) = 4.44$, $p < .005$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected at the .05 level of significance. This finding indicates that students' Grammar scores differed significantly according to their level of perceived sexism. The group means showed that students with low perceived sexism obtained the highest Grammar score ($M = 6.92$, $SD = 1.60$), followed by students with high perceived sexism ($M = 6.88$, $SD = 1.81$), whereas students with moderate perceived sexism had the lowest mean score ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 2.04$).

Discussion of Findings

From the findings of this study, it was revealed that research question one sought to determine whether students' Grammar performance differed according to their levels of perceived sexism in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State. In relation to this research question, the finding revealed a statistically significant difference in students' Grammar performance across low, moderate, and high levels of perceived sexism. Students with low perceived sexism obtained the highest mean Grammar score, while those with moderate perceived sexism recorded the lowest mean score. The difference was statistically significant, $F(2, 375) = 4.44$, $p = .012$. The post hoc analysis further established that the significant differences occurred between students with low and moderate perceived sexism and between students with moderate and high perceived sexism, while the difference between students with low and high perceived sexism was not statistically significant. Based on this result, the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no significant difference in students' Grammar performance across levels of perceived sexism, was rejected.

The finding indicates that students' Grammar performance varied significantly according to their perceived experiences of sexism. However, the pattern does not suggest a straightforward linear relationship in which Grammar performance consistently decreases as perceived sexism increases. Rather, students with moderate perceived sexism recorded the lowest performance, whereas the low- and high-sexism groups performed comparatively better. This irregular pattern suggests that perceived sexism may interact with other psychological, social, and educational factors in influencing students' Grammar performance. Nevertheless, the

statistically significant result demonstrates that students' perceptions of gender-related treatment are associated with differences in their ability to demonstrate grammatical knowledge.

One possible explanation for this finding is that perceived sexism may influence students' confidence, participation, and engagement in English Language lessons. Grammar learning requires frequent classroom interaction, practice, correction, feedback, and opportunities to apply grammatical rules in meaningful contexts. Where students perceive that they are treated differently because of their gender, they may become less willing to participate or may develop doubts about their academic competence. Such experiences may affect the extent to which students benefit from classroom activities and teacher feedback.

The finding is consistent with Gender Schema Theory, which provided the theoretical foundation for the study. The theory, as discussed in Chapter Two, proposes that individuals develop cognitive structures concerning gender from information obtained from their social environment. These gender schemas can influence how individuals perceive themselves, others, and activities associated with particular genders. When students perceive that grammatical competence is associated with a particular gender, such beliefs may become part of their academic self-concept and consequently influence their confidence and engagement in Grammar learning. The significant difference observed in the present study therefore provides empirical support for the proposition that gender-related perceptions can be associated with academic outcomes.

The finding also agrees with Oluomachi (2025), who reported that gender stereotypes and gender bias in English Language education influenced students' motivation, self-efficacy, academic aspirations, and perceptions of English as a gendered subject. The agreement between the two studies may be attributed to the recognition that gender stereotypes are not merely social opinions but can influence students' psychological orientations towards learning. When students believe that their gender is viewed as less capable in a particular academic area, their confidence and willingness to participate may be affected, with possible consequences for academic performance.

The finding has important implications for English Language teaching in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance. English Language teachers should ensure that grammatical competence is not associated with either male or female students and should provide all learners with equitable opportunities to answer questions, participate in Grammar exercises, receive corrective feedback, and demonstrate their understanding. Teachers should also be sensitive to subtle forms of gender stereotyping in classroom interaction, including differential expectations, unequal questioning opportunities, and differences in the encouragement provided to students. Gender-responsive teacher education and classroom practices may help reduce the negative effects of perceived sexism on students' academic confidence and engagement.

The finding from research question one and hypothesis one demonstrates that perceived sexism was significantly associated with differences in students' Grammar performance. The result provides partial empirical support for Gender Schema Theory and is consistent with previous research showing that gender stereotypes and gender-related perceptions can influence learners' confidence, motivation, and language achievement. Although the pattern across the three levels of perceived sexism was not linear, the significant difference confirms that students' perceptions of gender-related experiences are relevant to their Grammar learning. The finding therefore underscores the need for an equitable and gender-responsive English Language classroom in which students are encouraged to develop grammatical competence based on their abilities and efforts rather than gender-based expectations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that perceived sexism is significantly associated with students' Grammar performance in Malumfashi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State. The study established that students' Grammar performance differed significantly across the low, moderate, and high levels of perceived sexism.

Recommendations

Based on the finding that students' Grammar performance differed significantly across levels of perceived sexism, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) English Language teachers should adopt gender-equitable classroom practices. Teachers should provide male and female students with equal opportunities to answer questions, participate in Grammar exercises, lead classroom activities, and demonstrate their grammatical competence. Classroom participation should be determined by students' learning needs and abilities rather than gender expectations.

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