

# Nigerian High School Students Achievement and its Correlates to Achievement Drive

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## Abstract

It has been argued by many that an individual's posit to school work and achievement in school is central to the individual's performance in school. Moreover, intelligent girls are believed to shy away from high performance because of the believe that it could elicit social rejection. The present study was aimed at finding out the difference in academic performance of girls who are positively attuned to achievement and success in school as compared to those who are negatively so.

An investigator's constructed achievement orientation instrument was used for the study, while academic result of the students for two terms in English and Mathematics were used to find out the level of the student's performance. The findings of the study revealed no significant difference in performance between the two groups of subjects under study.

**Keywords:** Achievement • High school • Orientation • Gender • Disposition

## Introduction

The desire to do well in school and perform highly disposes an individual towards certain behavioral actions, based on one's perception of the need, usefulness and advantage of such performances. The need for high grade and high performance brings about a sort of readiness on the part of one (i) to be persistent at a given task in school, (ii) to be desirous to learn more about what has been taught; a preparedness to work long and not to be easily discouraged. Factors such as these could make the difference between success and failure in school.

Females behavioral dispositions towards achievement is believed to be different from males Thus, they are believed not to be generally oriented towards achievement or success outside domestic performance in the home. As much as possible, they avoid achieving or succeeding because of the notion that it is unfeminine to do so, especially because of the perceived negative consequences of academic attainment [1].

The tendency to avoid success is a tendency that inhibits achievement directed behavior as a result of concerns about the negative consequences of success. Thus, the position taken towards achievement inevitably affects performance as a result of one's psychology of avoiding success due to some precepts that one has already imbibed within. In educational attainment as well as occupational attainment, females are believed to be more disposed to inhibitions than males. In the light of this, a bright and intelligent young man whose aspiration is to be an attorney many instead settle for a career as a legal secretary because of the believe that success as an attorney may reduce her chances to be seen as a desirable woman. Some females "When faced with the conflict between their feminine image

and developing their abilities and interest, compromise by disguising their ability and abdicating from competition in the outside world [2]. In a similar vein, O'Leary VE and Hammack B [3] reported the tendency of females to avoid success. Other researchers such as Hoffman have also postulated that females who avoid high performance and success tend to have mothers with similar trait thus presupposing a relationship between mother influence on daughters disposition about success and performance. Thus students who are negatively attuned towards academic work may not perform as highly as their counterparts who may be positively tuned.

Cognizant of her future responsibilities, adolescent females who may plan to stay at home with young children or to work only part-time until they are older may not see the need to be disposed to high achievement in school.

It can be argued too that the sort of dependency that young females are given at childhood predisposes them to such dependency at everything including academics. Thus in school, this dependency syndrome does not allow many female to take much action that can make them perform highly. Anashesel CS and Rosen BC [4] went further to say that individuals whose dependency striving are accepted, perhaps even encouraged and who are warned that expressions of anger and self-assertion will cost them valued relationships feel weak and vulnerable. As an extra bonus, females who behave as encouraged are believed to enjoy a sense of acceptance and security that conformity to socio-cultural expectations usually brings. Anashesel CS and Rosen BC [4] equally reported in their study that females more than males report that they would be disliked if they were assertive,, competitive and pursued their competence, and to rather worry about the reaction of others to their appearance. This explains why many females do not dispose themselves favorably in school to much academic work.

The present study attempts to find out the difference (if any) in school performance between females who positively tune themselves to academics in school as compared to those who may negatively do same. This is necessary since it has been postulated by Horenkohl RC [5] that in order to understand the level of academic performance of an individual such individual's achievement behavior(s) should be central consideration.

## Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

In most societies, especially in traditional societies, of which Nigeria is one, gender disparities in access to higher education is very glaring, with women most often than not, totally excluded from formal education. This was especially so during the early period of the Christian missionaries in southern Nigeria. With colonialism and greater numbers of schools with some parents

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Received: 02 November, 2024, Manuscript No. assj-24-152044; Editor Assigned: 04 November, 2024, PreQC No. P-152044; Reviewed: 16 November, 2024, QC No. Q-152044; Revised: 22 November, 2024, Manuscript No. R-152044; Published: 29 November, 2024, DOI: 10.37421/2151-6200.2024.15.640

keying into schooling for the female child, there then began the subject stereotyping and the hidden curriculum.

On the school curriculum were subjects such as home economic and knitting. Females became the 'candidates' for the two subjects and agricultural studies were for the boys. And a cross over to agricultural class by girls or boys to home economics would raise eye brows. Thus the school curriculum stereotyping was taking shape in the early period of girl's getting the chance to go to school. And after schooling, the girls were initially relegated to professions such as nursing, teaching, and the arts. This became the trend as was obtainable for most women in the early 19th century to the middle of that century in other parts of the world.

According to UNESCO, female enrollment in tertiary education globally has increased significantly [6]. Access to higher education remains uneven though across different social classes, geographic regions, and educational systems. In some low- and middle-income countries such as Nigeria, cultural norms, economic barriers, and lack of infrastructure still hinder women's ability to access higher education. For example, in rural areas, traditional gender roles may limit women's educational opportunities, or women may face family pressure to prioritize domestic responsibilities over academic pursuits. Furthermore, gendered patterns of educational attainment may reflect broader socio-economic inequalities, with men from wealthier backgrounds still enjoying greater access to higher education.

Gender stereotypes can influence how students are treated by professors and peers, with female students sometimes encountering biases in how their ideas are received or evaluated. For example, female students may be less likely to be called upon in class, or their contributions may be undervalued compared to those of male students.

Furthermore, societal expectations surrounding femininity and career roles discouraged women from pursuing fields that are perceived as male-dominated, thus limiting their career trajectories and earnings potential.

A study by Gorman GM [7] believed women tend to have higher graduation rates and academic performance in general, particularly in undergraduate education. However, these academic achievements do not always translate into professional success, with women often facing barriers in terms of career progression within academia and other professional spheres. Women in academia report feeling marginalized in male-dominated spaces and face micro-aggressions from colleagues and students. In addition, the pressure to publish extensively and secure research funding disproportionately affects women, who often experience greater family obligations [8].

Gender inequality in academic performance is a function of varied factor especially in the more advanced nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America where there is higher standards of living and teaching procedures. Research has shown that women, particularly in the humanities, social sciences, and health sciences, often outperform men in school examinations and overall academic success.

Despite significant strides over the last century, gender disparities in access, experience, and outcomes in higher education is said to still persist globally. Women are often under-represented in positions of power, such as deanships, professorships, and university leadership roles. Research by Acker highlights that gendered organizational structures, leadership styles, and systemic biases in hiring and promotion processes contribute to the gender gap in higher education leadership [9]. Women, despite equal or higher levels of academic success, are equally said to be less likely to advance into senior academic and administrative positions. A key driver of this disparity is believed to be the "glass ceiling"; the invisible barriers that limit women's advancement in higher education and academia [10].

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there had been widened scope in girls school enrolments and wider professional scope out of the hitherto traditionally confined professions. Significant strides have been made in many countries toward gender parity in university enrolment and attainments though it can be said that disparities persist in certain regions and fields of study. And in some nations, even through the glass ceiling is said to still persist, women

with grits do get to enter and go into hitherto assumed masculine careers and professions. With many heading the governments of their nations at home and abroad that notwithstanding, and even though many do not believe women are inferior to men, it has not stopped the stereotypes in many quarters even in the most advanced nations such as the United States of America and Germany with women like Hilary Clinton and Chancellor Merkel giving different personal instances of such experiences.

While women may have made significant progress in terms of enrolment and academic performance, gender disparities persist in terms of career outcomes, leadership representation, and experiences of relating to gender. Addressing these issues requires systemic change at both the institutional and societal levels. To achieve true gender equality, higher education institutions must not only improve access and support for women but also dismantle the structural barriers and cultural biases that perpetuate inequality. Comprehensive policies, inclusive curricula, and proactive measures to combat gender-based violence are essential to creating an environment where all students can thrive, regardless of gender. Gender-sensitive curriculum reform, which would challenge entrenched biases in teaching and learning, is equally desirable [11].

## Statement of problem

Nigeria is still virtually a traditional society and though significant progress has been made overtime in the girl child school enrolment and attainments, many still say it all ends in the kitchen. Yet, behavioural dispositions are critical to achievement outputs.

The study aimed to find out the difference (if any) in school performance between females with positive and negative achievement drive.

## Methods

### Sampling technique

The survey method of research using the random sampling technique was adopted for the study. One hundred and fifty two senior secondary (SS 3) female students from eight schools in kwara state participated in the study. Though two hundred students were designated for the study, others could not be made use of because some did not fill their questionnaire while some were left out because though they filled their questionnaire as should, all their school scores could not be located.

**Instrument:** A questionnaire designed to measure students behavioural posit was designed. It was on a 4 point liken-like scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire contained twenty items. The test retest method of reliability was adopted for use. With an interval of three weeks and using the Pearson product moment of correlation, the coefficient was computed to be 0.93. The face validity of the instrument was equally confirmed.

**Scoring scheme:** The items were scored on the scale of 1-4, from strongly agree to strongly disagree on the questionnaire. Items on the questionnaire included the following:

- I don't submit all assignment on time.
- I am always attentive to the teacher
- I am not always interested in reading after school hours
- I am not always curious to know more about a topic the teacher has taught
- I sometimes don't work towards getting high grades in school
- I don't take any academic problem I have to my teacher
- During free period, I play or walk around
- I don't always work hard for school prize(s)

The scores of the female students were used to categories them as either

having "positive" or "negative" behavioral posit. After scoring, the mean (37) was calculated and those who fell on or above the mean were regarded as having a positive behavioral posit while those scoring below the mean were regarded as having negative behavioral posit.

Academic performance level was measured by the students 1<sup>st</sup> term examination results in English and Mathematics, which were analyzed separately. The raw scores were converted into their Z-scores for each of the students and subject before use and to determine the level of performance for each subject.

The t-statistics was equally used and the level of acceptance was 0.05

**Hypothesis 1:** Female students with positive behavioral posit towards achievement will not differ significantly in academic performance in English Language as compared to their counterparts with negative behavioral posit

**Hypothesis 2:** Female students with positive behavioral posit towards achievement will not differ significantly in academic performance in mathematics as compared to their counterparts with negative behavioral posit.

## Results

The t-test was performed on the mean scores of the students in English Language. The mean score calculated was 48.8 with an SD of 11.4 (N=99) for females with positive behavioural posit while a mean score of 46.9 with an SD of 12.3 (N=53) were obtained for those with negative behavioural posit. The observed  $t(150) = 97, P > 0.05$ ; which is not statistically significant was the result.

Hypothesis 1 is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using the scores for Mathematics. A mean score of 47.1 with an SD of 14.2 were obtained for females (N=99) with positive behavioral posit to achievement while a mean score of 46.9 and an SD of 14.0 were obtained (N=53) for those with negative behavioral posit. The observed t-value was  $t(150) = 0.7, P > 0.05$ , which was equally not statistically significant. Hypothesis 2 was therefore rejected.

## Discussion

It was observed that females who tended to be positively oriented towards academic work were higher in number (N=99) than those who had negative behavioral posit (N=53). It thus seem that most of the females in the study were not so negative in behavioral posit towards academic work.

It was equally observed that there was no significant difference in the scores of the subjects categorized as having positive or negative behavioral posit towards achievement in both the English Language and mathematics, the two subjects used for the study. This notwithstanding, it was observed that in both subjects, the scores of those who were positively posited towards academic work tended to be higher, with this being more so in English Language. This suggest that a positive behavioral posit towards academic work is recommendable, especially for female students, and that having a positive posit towards academic work would give the required impetus to having high grades in school. This is recommendable in view of the training which many girls are believed to have and if adopted could prove to be advantageous to them. The general poor attitude to mathematics by students

in the country could account for why more of the students had positive posit in the English subject.

## Conclusion

The research findings are at variance with the findings of other researchers such as Sherman (1979) and Singh (1972). Future researchers in this area could use the observational method as well as the questionnaire method together to determine students behavioural posit to achievement.

## Acknowledgement

None.

## Conflict of Interest

None.

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**How to cite this article:** Fagbemi, Mowaiye O. "Nigerian High School Students Achievement and its Correlates to Achievement Drive." *Arts Social Sci J* 15 (2024): 640.