

## EXPLORING GENDER DISPARITY IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF MALE STUDENTS' UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS, JOS-NORTH LGA, PLATEAU STATE

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the growing concern of male students' academic underachievement in public secondary schools in Jos-North Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State, Nigeria, with a focus on gender disparities in education. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised of all the public secondary schools with 910 teachers. 910 registered teachers working in public secondary schools in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State. 34% of the total populations (310 teachers) were chosen at random to make up the study sample. These teachers were drawn from ten different secondary schools. A self-structured questionnaire titled "exploring gender disparity in academic performance: a study of boys' underachievement in public secondary schools questionnaire (EGDAPSBUPSSQ) was used to gather data. Results indicated that societal expectations, peer pressure, lack of male role models, stereotypes, and financial struggles significantly impact male students' academic performance. The research issues were addressed using mean and standard deviation, and the null hypothesis was examined at 0.05 significance level using t-test statistics. An interpretive cutoff point of 2.50 was established for the outcomes. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that address these challenges to promote gender equity in education. The study recommends the adoption of gender-sensitive teaching methods, improved mentorship programs, and community engagement initiatives to support boys' academic success.*

**Keywords:** Gender disparity, academic performance, public secondary schools, educational inequality

### Introduction

Academic performance plays a critical role in shaping the future prospects of students and their ability to contribute effectively to the societal development. In recent years, the issue of gender disparity in academic performance has garnered significant attention globally and within Nigeria. While the historical trend favored males over females in educational attainment, a reversal of this pattern is now evident in many nations including Nigeria, with male students often underperforming compared to their female counterparts. This study explores the growing concern of male students' underachievement in public secondary schools in Jos-North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. In many developed and developing nations, females are outperforming males in several key academic metrics, particularly in reading and language arts, while male students still tend to outperform female students in fields like mathematics and science, though the gap is narrowing (OECD, 2020).

In Nigeria, the gender disparity in academic performance has shifted from female students being the disadvantaged group to male students' facing increasing academic challenges. Studies show that male students' are more likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, and achieve lower academic outcomes than female students (Ogunlade & Ayodele, 2022). This trend is particularly concerning egions like Plateau State, where socio-economic and cultural factors exacerbate the challenges male students face in education. The reversal of traditional gender roles in educational achievement highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the underlying causes of male students' academic underachievement.

Gender disparity in education refers to the perceptions of individuals based on their gender, which leads to differences in educational outcomes. It is rooted in cultural, societal, and institutional practices that shape male students' and female students' experiences in the educational system. Historically, girls were often marginalized in education due to cultural beliefs that prioritized boys' education over girls', especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2019). However, in recent years, shifts in social norms and the promotion of gender equality have led to increased female students participation and performance in education, while male students, particularly in secondary schools, are increasingly disengaging from academic activities. Research suggests that factors contributing to gender disparities in education include societal expectations, peer influence, learning environments, and the gender-specific learning needs of male students and male students (Ogundele, 2023). In the context of Jos-North LGA, gender roles, economic pressures, and lack of motivation among male students may contribute to their declining performance.

Over the past few decades, there has been a notable shift in global trends concerning gender disparity in academic performance. Historically, males outperformed male students particularly in subjects such as mathematics and science (UNESCO, 2020). However, more recent studies show that female students are now outperforming male students in various academic areas, especially in literacy and reading, while the gap in mathematics has been narrowing (OECD, 2020). This reversal has sparked concern about the underachievement of males, particularly in developed nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where male students are more likely to drop out of school, exhibit lower reading scores, and experience disengagement from academic activities (Francis & Skelton, 2021). Cross-national studies have posited that male students' academic underperformance is not limited to specific regions but is increasingly evident globally. In Europe, for example, boys are reported to be one-and-a-half years behind girls in reading by the time they reach the end of compulsory schooling age (Eurydice, 2019). Similarly, in Sub-Saharan Africa, males have been shown to perform worse than females in basic education, particularly in literacy (Moses et al., 2021). In Nigeria, the gender dynamics in academic performance have also undergone significant changes. Cultural practices such as early marriage, household responsibilities, and the belief that educating males was more beneficial economically contributed to this disparity. Currently, male students' academic underachievement has emerged as a significant issue in several parts of Nigeria, including Plateau State. Eze and Aboh (2023) Research indicates that female students are now more likely to drop out of secondary school, exhibit poor attendance, and perform worse than male students' in critical subjects such as English and mathematics National

Bureau of Statistics (2020) suggests that the gender gap is growing, with female students' outperforming male students' across many public schools in both rural and urban settings. In Plateau State's Jos-North LGA, the trend is evident, as boys increasingly lag behind academically, raising concerns about the future workforce and socio-economic implications.

Several factors contribute to the growing trend of male students' academic underachievement in Nigeria, particularly in Jos-North LGA. Socio-economic challenges are a significant driver, with many female students expected to contribute financially to their households from an early age, often at the expense of their education (Awopegba et al., 2021). This results in higher absenteeism and disengagement from school. In contrast, cultural expectations often place less emphasis on academic success for boys, especially in rural areas, where vocational skills and manual labor are more highly valued (Umar & Gambo, 2022). Psychological factors also play a role in female students' underperformance. Studies show that boys are more prone to behavioral issues in school, including attention deficit disorders and higher rates of disciplinary actions, which disrupt their learning process (Francis & Skelton, 2021). Additionally, Moses et al. (2021) posits that female students often lack the intrinsic motivation to succeed academically, as they are socialized to view education as less critical for their future success compared to girls, who may see education as a means of social mobility.

Ogunlade and Ayodele (2022) opined that in many Nigerian communities, traditional gender roles dictate that males are expected to be breadwinners, while females are encouraged to focus on academics as a way to improve their socio-economic status. This creates a mindset where boys may devalue academic achievement and prioritize earning an income, even at a young age. Such stereotypes can lead to female students disengaging from the education system, as they may not see the immediate relevance of schooling to their expected societal roles. Moreover, the notion that males are naturally less focused or disciplined in educational settings compared to females further reinforces their academic struggles. Teachers may unconsciously perpetuate these stereotypes by treating males as more prone to misbehavior and expecting less academic success from them (Eze & Aboh, 2023). These low expectations can contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where female students internalize these beliefs and underperform academically. However, addressing female students' underachievement requires a multifaceted approach that includes re-examining societal gender norms, adapting teaching practices to better suit males' learning styles, and addressing the socio-economic and psychological challenges they face. This study will contribute to understanding how these factors play out in the Jos-North LGA and provide insights into possible interventions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, there has been growing concern over the persistent underachievement of boys in public secondary schools, particularly in Jos-North LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. While gender disparity in education have historically favored boys, recent trends indicate that girls are now outperforming male students at almost every level of learning, creating a worrying gap in academic performance. This reversal of educational outcomes has far-reaching implications, particularly in a region like Jos-North, where education is crucial for future socio-economic development and stability. Despite various efforts by the Nigerian government and

educational stakeholders to address gender disparity in education, the issue of female students' underachievement remains prevalent. National policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program aim to provide equal access to education for all children, and initiatives have been launched to improve school infrastructure, teacher quality, and curriculum design. Additionally, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations have also worked to provide support for marginalized groups and raise awareness about the importance of education for both female students and male students. Educational stakeholders have taken steps to bridge the academic gap by introducing policies that promote inclusive learning environments and ensuring equal opportunities for both genders. Programs such as teacher retraining workshops, parental engagement schemes, and mentorship programs have been designed to boost female students' engagement and improve their academic outcomes. Some schools have introduced extra-curricular activities that specifically target female students, aiming to raise their interest in academic pursuits and reduce absenteeism and dropout rates. Despite efforts to improve female students' academic performance, several factors still contribute to their underachievement in Jos-North LGA. Many female students are expected to work or learn trades to support their families, which takes attention away from their education. Gender stereotypes also play a role, as female students are often seen as less focused on academic subjects like reading and writing, lowering their confidence and effort. The lack of female students' role models in schools, where most teachers are women, makes it harder for female students to stay motivated. Additionally, peer pressure and distractions like street hawking and gambling lead many boys away from school, worsening their academic performance.

Neglecting female students' underachievement has serious consequences. More female students may drop out of school, leading to a generation of uneducated young men with limited job prospects, which can trap them in poverty. This lack of education can also result in higher unemployment and even push some into crime, causing social instability in the area. In the long run, fewer skilled workers could hurt the local economy. As male students outperform female students, there may be an imbalance in the workforce, with more women in better-paying jobs and men left behind, creating further social tensions and marginalization for female students and female students. Despite the ongoing efforts of the government and educational stakeholders to promote equal access to education and improve the academic performance of all students, the problem of female students' underachievement in Jos-North LGA persists. If left unaddressed, this issue has the potential to exacerbate economic disparities, increase social instability, and perpetuate cycles of poverty in the region. Urgent interventions are needed to tackle the socio-cultural, psychological, and economic factors contributing to female students' academic decline, ensuring that both female students and male students can reach their full educational potential.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study is to Explore Gender Disparity in Academic Performance: A Study Of female students' Underachievement In Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA, Plateau State. The specific objectives:

1. To examine the causes of female students' underachievement compared to girls in Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA.
2. To investigate the extent to which underachievement of female students impact the overall educational performance in public schools in Jos North LGA

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will serve as a guide to this work.

1. What are the causes of female students' underachievement compared to girls in Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA?
2. To what extent does underachievement of female students impact the overall educational performance in public schools in Jos North LGA?

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference in academic performance between female students and female students in public secondary schools in Jos-North LGA.

### **Methodology**

For the study titled "exploring Gender Disparity in Academic Performance: A Study of female students' Underachievement in Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA, Plateau State" a descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised all the public secondary schools with approximately 910 teachers. 910 registered teachers working in public secondary schools in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State. 34% of the total populations (310 teachers) were chosen at random to make up the study sample. These teachers were drawn from ten different secondary schools. The self-structured questionnaire titled "exploring gender disparity in academic performance: a study of female students' underachievement in public secondary schools questionnaire (EGDAPSBUPSSQ) was used to gather data. The survey used a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument was validated by two experts; One from Department of Educational foundations, University of Jos and the other from the Department of educational administration and planning federal university dutsin-ma, katsina state. The research issues were addressed using mean and standard deviation, and the null hypothesis was examined at 0.05 significance level using t-test statistics. An interpretive cutoff point of 2.50 was established for the outcomes.

**Results and Discussions**

**Research Question One:** What are the causes of female students' underachievement compared to girls in Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA?

**Table 1:** Mean and Standard Deviation on the causes of female students' underachievement compared to female students in Public Secondary Schools, Jos-North LGA.

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1.	Society often expects male students to work or learn trades, which distracts them from school.	2.97	.72	Agree
2.	Stereotypes make male students' seem less focused on academics, especially reading and writing, reducing their motivation.	2.67	.63	Agree
3.	Without male students role models in schools, male students have fewer examples to follow, making them less engaged.	3.06	.74	Agree
4.	Peer pressure and distractions like street trading and gambling take male students away from their studies.	2.58	.61	Agree
5.	Cultural norms may prioritize female students' education, leaving male students' with less support and encouragement.	3.00	.73	Agree
6.	male students may feel less involved in subjects taught mainly by female teachers, leading them to lose interest.	2.91	.70	Agree
7.	Traditional teaching methods may not suit male students learning styles, causing them to lose interest in school.	2.92	.70	Agree
8.	Financial struggles often push male students to focus on work instead of school, leading to poor attendance and performance.	2.51	.58	Agree
9.	Male students lack the same level of academic counseling and mentorship that girls receive, affecting their progress.	2.71	.75	Agree
10.	In some areas, male students believe they'll get jobs without education, making them take school less seriously.	2.86	.73	Agree
<b>Average Mean</b>		<b>2.82</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>Agree</b>

N= 310

The findings presented in Table 1 align with various studies and reports that highlight the societal, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to males' underachievement in education, particularly in Public Secondary Schools in Jos-North LGA. The mean scores above

2.50 for all the items listed suggest strong agreement among respondents on the following key issues. Males are often encouraged to work or learn trades at an early age, which detracts from their academic engagement. This is consistent with research suggesting that societal expectations for males to become breadwinners may lead them to prioritize work over education (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008). Similarly, stereotypes that portray boys as less focused on academics, particularly in areas like reading and writing, are found to reduce boys' motivation and academic performance (Francis & Skelton, 2005). Peer influences, including involvement in street trading and gambling, are commonly cited as major distractions for males. According to UNICEF (2019), in regions where economic instability prevails, males often face pressures to contribute financially to their households, leading to absenteeism and poor academic performance, that cultural norms may prioritize females' education, leaving males with less support and encouragement. In certain areas, boys may perceive that they can secure employment without the need for formal education, thereby taking their schooling less seriously. This perception is often reinforced by local job markets where skilled labor is prioritized over academic qualifications (Odekunle, 2014). These factors underscore the multifaceted reasons for boys' underachievement compared to girls in public secondary schools. The average mean score of 2.82 further supports the conclusion that societal expectations, economic pressures, and educational practices contribute significantly to this trend.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent does underachievement of boys impact the overall educational performance in public schools in Jos North LGA?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent underachievement impact the overall educational performance in public schools.**

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
11.	Boys' poor performance leads to more dropouts, lowering overall school completion rates.	2.86	.69	Agree
12.	Boys' underachievement brings down the school's overall academic scores.	2.52	.58	Agree
13.	Gender imbalance in achievement may discourage both boys and girls, hurting the learning environment.	2.56	.60	Agree
14.	Boys' poor performance can cause classroom behavior problems, disrupting learning for others.	3.01	.73	Agree
15.	Schools with many underachieving boys may struggle to get resources or recognition, limiting growth.	2.79	.67	Agree

16.	Boys' low performance can demotivate teachers from helping struggling students.	2.72	.65	Agree
17.	Boys' underachievement means fewer males go on to higher education, lowering academic progression.	2.67	.63	Agree
18.	Boys' poor results limit their job prospects, negatively impacting the school's reputation.	2.69	.64	Disagree
19.	Boys' low performance leads to a less diverse and skilled future workforce.	3.01	.73	Agree
20.	Continued underachievement among boys hinders the goal of equal education and school success.	3.05	.74	Agree
<b>Average Mean</b>		<b>2.79</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>Agree</b>

N= 310

The analysis of Table 2, showing mean scores above the acceptable threshold of 2.50 for items 11 through 20, reveals significant agreement among respondents regarding the broader impacts of males' underachievement in public secondary schools, particularly in Jos-North LGA. These findings point to a series of negative consequences that affect not only the boys themselves but also the schools and the educational system as a whole. With an average mean score of 2.79, the responses reflect a high-level consensus that males' underachievement influences educational performance on multiple fronts. The correlation between males' poor academic performance and higher dropout rates is well documented in the literature. The finding is in line with the work of Hango (2013), males who consistently perform poorly are more likely to lose interest in school, leading to increased dropout rates, which negatively impacts overall school completion rates. When a significant portion of the student population underperforms, the school's overall academic standing is affected. Research by Murphy and Weinhardt (2020) supports the idea that males' underachievement drags down school averages, impacting the institution's reputation and leading to fewer resources. That males' poor performance can cause classroom behavior problems, disrupting learning for others, that schools with many underachieving males may struggle to get resources or recognition, limiting growth, males' poor performance is often linked to behavioral issues, which disrupt learning for other students. Disengaged males may become disruptive, creating challenges for teachers and further diminishing the learning environment (Skelton, 2010). Males' continued underachievement undermines the goal of providing equal educational opportunities for all students, equal education is not only about access but also about ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, succeed and achieve their potential. That males' underachievement means fewer males

go on to higher education, lowering academic progression, that males' poor results limit their job prospects, negatively impacting the school's reputation. The underperformance of males poses a barrier to achieving these educational objectives (Moffitt, 2018). This means males' low performance leads to a less diverse and skilled future workforce, and that continued underachievement among males hinders the goal of equal education and school success. The average mean score of 2.79 indicates that respondents believe males' underachievement significantly impacts the overall educational performance of public schools. This finding echoes broader research indicating that systemic and societal factors contribute to the educational challenges faced by males, which in turn affect school success.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in academic performance between boys and girls in public secondary schools in Jos-North LGA.

**Table 3: t-test Analysis on the Mean Rating on the academic performance between boys and girls in public secondary schools in Jos-North LGA.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Standard Error	t <sub>tal</sub>	t <sub>tab</sub>	P-value	Remarks
<b>Boys</b>	195	2.83	0.68						
				308	0.77	14.25	1.96	0.001	Reject Ho
<b>Girls</b>	115	2.76	0.66						

The results presented in Table 3 indicate a statistically significant difference in academic performance between boys and girls in public secondary schools in Jos-North LGA. The calculated t-value (14.25) exceeds the critical t-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. This finding leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in academic performance between the two genders. Consequently, it is evident that there is a measurable and significant difference in academic performance between boys and girls in public secondary schools within the study area. This result aligns with findings from the study of Yusuf and Adigun (2010) reported significant gender disparities in academic achievement in mathematics and science subjects among Nigerian secondary school students, with girls outperforming boys in certain contexts.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that males' underachievement in public secondary schools in Jos-North LGA is a significant and multifaceted issue. Societal expectations, peer pressure, and lack of male role models contribute to male students' disengagement from academics. Additionally, teaching methods that do not align with male students' learning styles and the socio-economic burden placed on them exacerbate the problem.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following five recommendations were made:

1. Schools should encourage more male teachers and mentors to actively participate in teaching and learning, for easy control, guidance and motivation of the male students
2. Implement after-school programs focused on academic tutoring and life skills training to help male students manage socio-economic pressures and stay engaged with their education.
3. Community-wide awareness campaigns should challenge stereotypes that devalue male students' education and emphasize the importance of academic success for both genders.
4. Schools should work with parents to foster a supportive home environment, encouraging boys to prioritize their education and providing the necessary resources to succeed academically.

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