

Lifestyle, Gender and Academic Underachievement in English Language Among Students with Learning Disabilities

Adebayo Adeyinka Salako, Ph.D

Department of Special Needs and Guidance and Counselling, Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo

Olusola Akintunde Adediran, Ph.D

Department of Special Needs and Guidance and Counselling, Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo

Adebimpe Olubunmi Adebajo

Department of European Languages Education Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the impact of lifestyle and gender on academic under-achievement in English language among students with learning difficulties. A survey-based descriptive research design was utilized. The population for this study comprises all pupils with learning difficulties in the Oyo North Senatorial District of Oyo State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed to pick five local governments within the senatorial district. Within each local government, a simple random sample technique was utilized to select two secondary schools. This resulted in a total of ten schools included in the study. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to pick a total of two hundred and eighty-seven (287) individuals, with twenty-nine participants chosen from each school. A questionnaire was employed to obtain information about the lifestyle of students with learning disabilities. Additionally, the Mychebust learning disabilities rating scale (with a correlation coefficient of 0.76) and an English language accomplishment exam were utilized to identify students with specific learning difficulties who have not reached their full potential in English language proficiency. Two hypotheses were proposed, with the first one being examined at a significance level of 0.01 and the second one being tested at significance levels of 0.01 and 0.05. The instrument life-style questionnaire (LSQ) demonstrated a reliability coefficient of $r=0.86$. The study's findings indicated notable correlations between lifestyle and academic underperformance in students with learning difficulties. Additionally, gender disparities in academic underachievement were observed among the participants. The following recommendations were given: students with learning difficulties should receive appropriate guidance on how to lead a positive and resilient lifestyle. Furthermore, it is crucial for teachers to instruct students in the attentive and accurate repetition and recognition of challenging English vocabulary.*

KEYWORDS: lifestyle, gender, academic-underachievement, learning disabilities

INTRODUCTION

Parental and pedagogical distress is unparalleled when confronted with children whose academic performance falls short of the potential that their aptitudes indicate they are capable of attaining. These children are classified as underachievers; however, there is a lack of consensus over the precise definition of this word. The problem of academic "underachievement" is a major concern among educational stakeholders. According to McBee (2007), academic underachievement is a widespread issue that has long fascinated educators and continues to be a significant concern. There is a lack of agreement on the most effective way to describe underachievement due to a difference between one's ability and their actual achievements (Reis and McCoach 2000). Based on these differing perspectives, it may be inferred that underachievers encompass a wide range of individuals. Academic underachievement refers to the inability to meet the academic standards set by the institution. Contrary to common belief, Reiss (2008) argued that underachieving learners are not lacking in drive. Instead, they are highly motivated in areas other than academic achievement. This recognizes that academic underperformance can sometimes arise from extraneous situations that divert young individuals from focusing on their academic tasks. Adolescents who do not make use of their abilities squander the educational and career prospects that are easily accessible to them.

While the examination of underachievement has a lengthy educational background, it is more effective to focus on the factors that drive children to excel. Frequently, kids with exceptional academic potential typically do not achieve at a level that matches their talents. Certain children who do not perform well academically may have a lack of belief in their own talents, a lack of direction in setting goals, or a lack of skills in self-regulation. Other students who perform poorly may have either evident or hidden problems. Additionally, some kids may underachieve due to unsuitable educational situations or environments (Reis and McCoach, 2000). Davis and Rimm (2011) sees underachievement as a difference between a child's academic performance and a measure of their abilities, such as an intelligence quotient (IQ) score. These explanations may appear clear and concise, but they offer limited guidance to parents and teachers seeking to handle this issue with each student on an individual basis.

Underachievement is a mutable behaviour that can evolve over time. Frequently, underachievement is perceived as a predicament stemming from one's mindset or work ethic. Nevertheless, both habits and attitude cannot be altered as directly as behaviours (Adelodun and Salako, 2020) This study specifically targeted secondary school students with learning difficulties who are not performing up to their potential in the subject of English Language. Reading and writing are crucial components of literacy, with reading being a receptive skill and writing being a productive talent. Both of these talents are essential both inside and outside of educational institutions. Reading is the cognitive skill of comprehending written words, extracting information from various sources such as books and newspapers, and vocalizing the words in a book for

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auditory perception. Writing encompasses the skill of using a pen or pencil to create letters, words, or numbers, as well as the act of expressing thoughts or ideas in a book, newspaper, or letter. According to UNESCO (2015), literacy encompasses various skills like reading printed materials, extracting information from computers, and understanding information displayed on posters and signs. It goes beyond basic abilities in reading, writing, and math, and emphasizes how individuals utilize these skills. These two skills, along with two others, are essential for developing literacy among students with learning impairments (SLD) in school. Listening and speaking are the last fundamental abilities. The statement above suggests that it is crucial for kids with learning difficulties to graduate from school with strong literacy skills in order to be useful members of society. Reading and writing are primarily employed to access and distribute knowledge from printed and electronic sources, in order to efficiently operate in society. Nevertheless, language encompasses more than just education, and education encompasses more than just language. However, it is impossible to separate one from the other, as they are intricately intertwined. Language serves as the medium by which knowledge is conveyed. To ensure that literacy skills have a significant impact on educational growth, it is crucial to prioritize the issue of quality. Inadequate access to reading resources would ultimately result in subpar performance in other language proficiencies. Children with learning difficulties are a diverse group. These children comprise a heterogeneous collection of individuals, displaying potential challenges across various domains. As an illustration, one child with a learning disability may encounter substantial challenges in reading, but another youngster may not face any reading difficulties at all, but instead struggle significantly with written communication. Learning difficulties can vary in severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. Students also vary in their ability to cope with challenges (Bowe, 2005).

Therefore, it is crucial to determine the specific talents that contribute to success in reading. Students with learning disabilities exhibit a higher prevalence of reading difficulties compared to other areas of academic performance. It is the most common form of academic challenge faced by kids with learning difficulties. Approximately 90% of kids with learning disabilities are believed to experience difficulties in reading, with even conservative estimates suggesting that around 60% of these pupils face such challenges (Bender, 2001).

In addition, students with learning disabilities (LD) struggle to acquire fundamental skills or academic information as a result of challenges in comprehending or utilizing spoken or written language. This challenge may have an effect on a student's capacity to read, write, spell, think, communicate, listen, or perform mathematical tasks. This study aims to investigate the impact of lifestyle on students with learning difficulties and poor academic performance in English language. It is widely thought that lifestyle significantly influences the success or failure of achieving goals. Lifestyle refers to the distinctive patterns and behaviours that define an individual, community, or society. Lifestyle refers to the manner in which individuals with learning disabilities (LD) or a collective of persons carry out their daily lives and engage in their professional activities. A healthy lifestyle results in physical fitness, increased energy, and a decreased susceptibility to diseases, all

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of which are determined by the choices individuals make in their daily activities. Optimal nutrition, regular physical activity, and sufficient sleep form the fundamental pillars for maintaining good health. It is crucial to manage stress in constructive ways rather than resorting to alcohol use or smoking, since these behaviours can exacerbate the body's hormonal imbalances and accelerate physical deterioration. Nevertheless, in order to achieve a prolonged and more enjoyable existence, an individual needs formulate a multitude of strategies for maintaining a healthy way of life. The health of students with learning disabilities is closely tied to their lifestyle. Being healthy implies having good health and a reduced likelihood of falling ill, indicating overall well-being. The term "healthy" refers to an individual who has infrequent illness or to items that promote excellent health. According to Leemann (2020), keeping a healthy lifestyle has a significant impact on academic achievement, self-awareness, and self-care. It is an essential aspect of preserving excellent health and leading a lively life. It is a lifestyle that encompasses actions aimed at rejuvenating personal motivation and fostering personal growth. Research suggests that students with learning disabilities who cultivate a well-balanced lifestyle in a supportive setting are more likely to achieve optimal academic achievement (Clark, 2013).

This study also investigated the impact of gender on students with learning difficulties and their academic underperformance in the English language. Girls in numerous nations are transitioning to upper secondary schools at a higher rate than boys (Hadjar and Berge 2022). Nevertheless, the current rates of transition for women to gain eligibility for admission into Higher Education institutions remain lower than those of men. Additionally, there continues to be a persistent gender divide in the selection of study courses and academic performance. When considering gender and academic under-performance, it is important to note that school grades and transitions are connected to achievement and ability. However, it is crucial to understand that these factors only indicate a certain level of success in school and may not necessarily reflect one's aptitude. When examining gender differences in education, it is important to take into account the distinct patterns of gender inequalities that exist at different stages of the educational journey. A recent meta-analysis of empirical studies conducted in Germany and Switzerland suggests that there are no significant gender disparities in academic performance, particularly during the pre-school years, for both girls and boys (Blossfeld 2011; Hadjar 2012).

Furthermore, guys exhibit a higher rate of school dropout. The findings of a Swiss study conducted by Hadjar and Luspatsch in 2010 indicate that girls outperform boys in language topics such as German, French, English, and Music, based on a random sample of schools. Regarding other disciplines, there are no discernible gender disparities in academic achievement. No gender disparities in favour of boys were detected. Research conducted in Luxembourg found that boys were more frequently put in lower secondary school tracks compared to girls (Hadjar 2012). Nevertheless, these disparities were mitigated when academic performance was taken into account, indicating that there are no gender disparities in decision-making when boys and girls attain similar academic results. However, there is a distinct disparity in academic performance across genders, with females generally surpassing boys. The International Student Assessment (ISA, 2013)

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revealed that girls outperformed boys significantly in Languages, while boys lagged behind in Mathematics. Higher education institutions in numerous countries witness a greater proportion of women commencing their studies compared to men. Nevertheless, the rates at which individuals transition to Higher Education, namely the proportion of individuals who are eligible to pursue higher education and actually enrol in higher education programs, remain higher for men (Rayneri and Wiley, 2006).

The scientific discourse around underachieving boys in education has explored various areas, namely examining pupils with learning disabilities and their distinctive traits, as well as factors related to motivation, attitude, and behaviour. Males have a deficiency in inherent drive, possess a diminished inclination towards academia, and are more prone to experiencing a sense of detachment inside the educational environment. Male students also exhibit worse ratings in terms of their subjective well-being in the school environment. Furthermore, there exist gender disparities in behaviours that are relevant to achieving educational achievement. According to Reiss (2016), boys tend to react more frequently to failure and frustration by displaying aggressive and violent behaviours. According to Reiss (2016), disruptive behaviours among males can hinder their school progress and may be tolerated by teachers. They characterized males as having "lazybones syndrome". There is a suggestion that boys often exhibit lower levels of effort and a diminished feeling of duty compared to girls. In addition, the leisure activities that students engage in outside of school are equally significant. Boys tend to prioritize leisure time more than girls and are less focused on school-related activities. Media usage is often identified as a prominent factor contributing to the comparatively lower academic achievement of boys. According to Caro (2019), boys allocate a greater portion of their free time compared to girls to using the computer for activities such as playing games and watching films that are not suitable for their age. This may detract from their focus on learning, as well as diverting part of their cognitive capacities required for school-related tasks.

Problem Statement

There is currently an increasing concern to address the issue of academic under-achievement among students with learning difficulties, particularly in the subject of English language. An observed disparity between aptitude and academic performance has led to feelings of frustration, withdrawal from education, instances of bullying, and similar issues among students with learning difficulties. The impact of motivation and environmental factors has been employed to mitigate the issue of underachievement in individuals with learning difficulties, although the problem continues to remain. The researchers want to address this problem by examining the lifestyle of students with learning impairments and its impact on their performance in English language. Additionally, they seek to identify any gender disparities among students with learning disabilities in terms of academic under-achievement in English language.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is as follows;

- i. to find out the relationship between lifestyle and academic underachievement in English language of students with LD.
- ii. investigate the difference between male and female students with learning disabilities academic underachievement in English language.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were raised, while the first one was tested at 0.01 level of significant and the second hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significant.

H01: There is no significant relationship between students with learning disabilities lifestyle and academic under-achievement in English Language.

H02: There is no significant difference between male and female students with learning disabilities academic-underachievement in English Language.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers chose to utilize a descriptive research design of the survey type because they did not modify any variables in the investigation. The demographic comprises all the pupils with learning difficulties in the Oyo North Senatorial District. The researchers employed a multistage sampling technique. The Oyo North senatorial district comprises thirteen (13) local governments, from which five local governments were chosen at random using the simple random selection technique. Using a simple random sampling technique, ten secondary schools were selected, with two schools chosen from each of the five local government areas. A purposive sampling approach was employed to choose 290 participants for this study. Specifically, 29 adolescents with learning difficulties were chosen from each of the 10 secondary schools. However, only two hundred and eighty-seven (287) was taken into consideration.

The researcher employed a questionnaire to gather data. The questionnaire was labelled as a lifestyle questionnaire (LSQ). Section A of the instrument included the demographic information of the participants, whereas section B consisted of 20 items that assessed the lifestyle of students with learning impairments. The instrument had a pilot test with kids who have learning impairments but were not part of this study. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined to be $r=0.86$ using Cronbach Alpha estimate. The consent forms were provided to the individuals who willingly accepted to take part in this investigation. In addition, a proficiency test in the English language was given to the participants. Individuals who fall within the 40 to 49 percentile range are classified as having learning problems, provided they have undergone a thorough screening using the Myklebust rating scale. The Learning Disabilities Rating Scale is a screening tool created by Myklebust and amended in 1981. The instrument is standardized, versatile, and may be simply adjusted to any cultural context without modification. The scale has demonstrated good accuracy in identifying children with a significant risk of academic failure,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK even in Nigeria. This is due to the absence of any discriminatory characteristics. Ikeju (1995) and Kanu (2004). The researchers employed this scale to assess children with learning disabilities and discovered it to be highly effective and appropriate. The scale had a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.76$.

Data Analysis

The raw data was collected and subjected to the descriptive analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and t-test at 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table: 1 shows the significant Relationship between lifestyle and academic underachievement in English language (PPMC)

variables	Mean	SD	N	1	2
Lifestyle	24.31	4.19	287	-	
Academic underachievement	32.42	5.54	287	23**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

HO1: The above table revealed that there is a positive relationship between lifestyle and academic underachievement in English language among students with Learning Disabilities ($r = .23^{**}$, $df = 285$, $p < .01$) The result implies that lifestyle of students with learning disabilities has to do with their academic-underachievement in English language.

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Table 2 shows the significant difference between male and female students with learning disabilities and academic under-achievement in English language

	N	X	SD	df	t	p
Male	189	20.19	5.62	285	-2.19	<.05
Female	98	21.59	5.09			

H02: The t-test of the significant difference between male and female students with learning disabilities and academic under-achievement in English language ($X = t(285) = -2.19, p <.05$). This implies that there is significant difference between male and female and academic-underachievement in English language because the hypothesis was rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the recent study on the impact of lifestyle on academic under-achievement in English language among students with learning disabilities in Oyo North Senatorial district showed that the hypothesis, which claimed that there was no significant connection between lifestyle and academic under-achievement in English language, was unequivocally disproven. The findings indicated a clear and positive correlation between lifestyle and academic under-achievement. This demonstrates that individuals who maintain a healthy lifestyle have had more success in their English language studies compared to those who adopt an unhealthy lifestyle. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Leemann (2020), which indicates that maintaining a healthy lifestyle significantly impacts the academic performance of students with learning impairments. A good lifestyle enhances the awareness of individuals with learning disabilities regarding the choices they make in their lives. Furthermore, it enhanced their self-awareness and self-care, enabling them to approach their education with caution and excel academically, particularly in the English language, which is the main emphasis of this research.

Moreover, this discovery also supports the research conducted by Hadjar and Berge (2022), which demonstrated that adopting a healthy lifestyle enables individuals with specific learning difficulties (SLD) to be physically and mentally prepared for academic tasks, thus enhancing their academic performance. Furthermore, there have been reports indicating that adopting a healthy lifestyle might effectively decrease the likelihood of developing ailments that may impede academic performance.

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The second hypothesis, which claimed that there would be no significant difference between male and female students with learning disabilities (LD) and academic under-achievement in English language, was likewise disproven. This indicates that there is a notable disparity between male and female students with learning disabilities (LD) in terms of their academic underperformance in the English language. This conclusion was corroborated by Hannover's (2018) research, which indicated that boys tend to attain lower scores compared to girls. Additionally, boys are more likely to respond to failure and frustration by exhibiting aggressive behaviour. This behaviour is linked to lower educational achievement, as it disrupts the learning process and hinders success in boys. According to Adjar's (2010) study, girls consistently outperform boys in language disciplines (such as German, French, and English), including Music. A study conducted by Davis and Rimm (2011) revealed a distinct gender disparity, with girls demonstrating superior performance compared to boys. Furthermore, the Programme of International Association (ISA, 2013) conducted a competence test which indicated that girls outperformed boys in language skills. This suggests that girls with learning difficulties have greater proficiency in the English language compared to guys with similar disabilities. However, Blossfeld (2011) conducted a study that was included in a meta-analysis of empirical studies from Germany and Switzerland. This study contradicted the previous findings and concluded that there is no significant gender difference in attendance at pre-schooling. Both girls and boys were found to attend pre-schooling institutions at similar rates. At this early period, it is possible to identify gender-specific behavioural and interest patterns related to the expression of gender socialization. It was noted that females demonstrated higher proficiency in reading, while boys excelled in mathematics and sciences.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were emerged

- i. Students with learning disabilities should be properly guided on their lifestyle to make them chose good and formidable lifestyle.
- ii. Students with LD should be monitored by the teachers and the parents/guardian in order to know the peers to associate with.
- iii. The teachers should be properly familiar with the SLD and make sure they focus on difficult words in English language during teaching and learning process.
- iv. Repetition and recognition of words should be carefully taught.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious in this current study that lifestyle of the student with LD plays an important role in the accomplishment of their academic achievement. Good nutrition, daily exercise contributes to healthy lifestyle while bad life style such as smoking, drinking alcohol aggravate wear and tear on

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the body at the hormonal level which can affect the body and mental system that are associated
with academic under-achievement in English language among students with learning disabilities.

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