

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DEPRESSION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KATSINA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of depression on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area of Katsina State. The research was guided by two objectives, two research questions, and two corresponding hypotheses. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 5,461 senior secondary school students, from which a sample of 365 students was selected, in line with the guidelines of the Research Advisors (2006). Data were collected using the Beck Depression Inventory-II to assess levels of depression, while students' third-term Mathematics scores served as a measure of academic performance. The instruments yielded reliability coefficients of 0.82 and 0.72, respectively. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and independent t-test statistics. Findings revealed no significant relationship between depression and academic performance ($r = -0.042$, $p = .364$), indicating that depression does not significantly influence students' academic outcomes. Additionally, no significant gender difference was found in depression levels, with mean scores of 27.17 for male and 27.88 for female students, $t(365) = -0.995$, $p = .320$. Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools implement mental health support programs to help students manage depression, while recognizing that it may not directly impact academic achievement.

Keywords: Depression, Academic Performance, Senior Secondary School Students, Gender Differences

Introduction

Depression is a psychological condition marked by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, and a lack of motivation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), it is one of the leading causes of disability worldwide and a major contributor to suicide rates. Among students, undetected or untreated depression can significantly impact mental health, often leading to social withdrawal, behavioral issues, and academic challenges. It may also manifest in poor hygiene, reduced self-care, and diminished self-esteem.

In educational settings, depression can be difficult to identify, as it often presents through subtle changes in behavior. Students with depression may appear emotionally detached, unmotivated, or uninterested in learning. Left unaddressed, depression can interfere with everyday functioning and persist over time, disrupting the student's academic progress. Such individuals may downplay their strengths while fixating on perceived failures, which deepens their emotional struggles (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Depression is particularly prevalent among secondary school students globally and poses serious risks to their academic and emotional development. While the condition is treatable, its effects can be far-reaching

when ignored. Senior secondary school students are especially vulnerable due to the pressures of academic performance, emotional conflicts, and the social challenges of adolescence. In Nigeria, these stressors are often compounded by limited access to mental health resources. Students experiencing depression frequently lack the confidence to meet expectations, leading to a cycle of low self-worth and academic underachievement.

Research has shown that students who see themselves as less capable than their peers are more prone to depression (Ogundele, 2020). When teachers or classmates view a student as socially or academically inadequate, it can reinforce these feelings, increasing the likelihood of depression. The influence of depression on student mental health, though significant, is still often overlooked in many public school systems. A growing number of senior secondary school students exhibit symptoms such as absenteeism, persistent sadness, lack of concentration, disinterest in schoolwork, and even suicidal thoughts (Nwoke, 2020).

Further evidence suggests that perceptions of inferiority or incompetence contribute significantly to depressive symptoms among adolescents (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). Depression in students often co-occurs with other psychological or behavioral issues, such as irritability, social withdrawal, or unexplained physical complaints (McCarthy et al., 2018). These symptoms not only affect students' emotional well-being but also interfere with their academic performance and social relationships. Given its wide-ranging effects, depression among senior secondary school students is a critical concern that warrants urgent attention in educational research and practice.

Statement of the Problem

Academic performance among secondary school students remains a major concern for key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, and government agencies. In Nigeria, academic success is often viewed as a critical determinant for employment, career progression, and social mobility in both the public and private sectors. According to Mohammed (2019), academic performance reflects the degree to which a student achieves short- or long-term educational goals.

In recent years, there has been growing concern over the declining academic performance of secondary school students, particularly in external examinations. In Katsina State, this trend is evident in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) results from 2018 to 2022. The percentage of students who obtained at least five credits, including English Language and Mathematics, were 27.7%, 55.0%, 48.4%, 40.2%, and 56.6%, respectively (WAEC, 2022). These fluctuations suggest persistent academic challenges among students.

Several studies have identified multiple factors that influence academic outcomes, including the classroom environment, teaching quality, and student motivation (Stuart-Kotze, 2014; Smith et al., 2021). However, one increasingly recognized factor is the impact of students' mental health particularly depression. Depression among adolescents can lead to reduced concentration, low motivation, poor attendance, and decreased academic engagement, all of which may contribute to underperformance in school.

Given these concerns, this study seeks to explore the influence of depression on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Dutsin-Ma Zonal Quality Assurance, with the aim of contributing to data-driven educational and psychological interventions.

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the influence of depression on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Mathematics within the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area.
2. To investigate gender differences in depression and how they relate to academic performance among senior secondary school students in the same zone.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the level of depression among senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area?
2. What is the difference in academic performance based on the level of depression between male and female senior secondary school students in Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area?

Research Hypotheses

To guide the investigation, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant influence of depression on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Mathematics within the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of depression between male and female senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between depression and academic performance among senior secondary school students in Katsina State. The design was chosen to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the two variables, depression (independent variable) and academic performance (dependent variable) as supported by Creswell and Plano (2020).

The population of the study comprised all Senior Secondary School Two (SSS II) students under the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance Zone. The population comprises of five thousand, four hundred and sixty one (5,461) students, a sample of 365 students was randomly selected, based on the sample size determination guideline by Research Advisor (2006).

The research instrument used for data collection was reviewed and validated by experts in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Federal University Dutsin-Ma. Its reliability was established using the Cronbach's Alpha method, yielding coefficients of 0.82 and 0.72, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The instrument was personally administered by the researchers to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Data collected were analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between students' levels of depression and their academic performance.

Results

Hypotheses Testing

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of depression on the academic performance of senior secondary school students within the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area.

To examine this hypothesis, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between students' levels of depression and their academic performance. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between depression and academic performance

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	R-value	p-value	Decision
Depression	365	27.57	7.712	363	-0.042	0.364	Not Sig.
Academic Performance	365	38.51	11.148				

Table 1 results shows a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.042$, $p = .364$), suggesting no significant relationship between depression and academic performance. The p-value of 0.364 exceeds the significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the relationship is not statistically significant. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that depression does not have a statistically significant influence on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Education Quality Assurance.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant gender difference in depression levels among senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area.

To test this hypothesis, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the depression scores of male and female students. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: t-Test analysis showing gender difference on Depression

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	195	27.17	6.979	365	-.995	0.320	Not Sig.
Female	170	27.88	8.242				

As shown in the table, male students had a mean depression score of 27.17 (SD = 6.979), while female students had a slightly higher mean of 27.88 (SD = 8.242). Although female students reported higher depression scores on average, the difference was not statistically significant, $t(365) = -0.995$, $p = 0.320$. Since the p-value (.320) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no significant gender difference in depression levels among senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma ZEQA area.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that depression does not have a significant influence on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area of Katsina State. This result aligns with the findings of Adewuyi and Oladipo (2020), who reported that some students are able to cope effectively with depression through strategies such as stress management and the support of family, friends, or school counsellors. These protective factors may help reduce the negative impact of depression on their academic outcomes.

Similarly, a study by Ojewumi and Adeyinka (2023) found that many students demonstrate resilience and adaptability, enabling them to manage symptoms of depression while maintaining their academic performance. This is further supported by the work of Olowookere and Oyewole (2022), who observed no significant relationship between depression scores and academic achievement. They suggested that

some students are able to compartmentalize emotional struggles, allowing them to remain focused on their studies. In addition, the study found no significant gender differences in the levels of depression experienced by senior secondary school students in the study area. Both male and female students reported similar experiences with depression. This finding is consistent with Adewuya and Oladipo (2018), who noted that students, regardless of gender, often face comparable academic demands, social pressures, and transitional challenges that may lead to similar levels of psychological distress.

This outcome may be attributed to changing societal norms and evolving gender roles in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Education Quality Assurance. As traditional expectations become less rigid, students of both genders may be exposed to similar stressors, resulting in comparable emotional experiences, including depression.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that depression does not have a significant impact on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in the Dutsin-Ma Zonal Educational Quality Assurance area of Katsina State. This suggests that depression, while a serious mental health concern, does not necessarily hinder students' academic achievement in this context. Additionally, the study found no significant difference in the experience of depression between male and female students, indicating that both genders are similarly affected.

Recommendations

1. Teachers, school counsellors, and administrators should adopt proactive psychological strategies to support students' mental well-being. This includes motivating students, encouraging open and empathetic communication, and creating a safe, non-judgmental space where students feel comfortable discussing their emotions and concerns.
2. Educational psychologists should apply relevant techniques such as behavior modification, cognitive conditioning, counselling, and role modeling to strengthen students' mental health and self-esteem. They should also actively promote awareness and guide students toward seeking professional mental health support when needed.

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