

Assessment of Students' Attitude towards Test-Taking in Secondary Schools in Afikpo Education Zone Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Assessment of students' attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State, Nigeria was the main thrust of this study. The study was guided by four null hypotheses in line with the ex-post facto research design. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed in selecting a sample 1,276 respondents from a population of 12,763 students distributed across 43 public and 71 private secondary schools in the study area. Students' Attitudes Towards Test-Taking Questionnaire (SATTQ) with Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .893 was used for data collection. The null hypotheses were all tested at .05 level of significance using population t-test and independent t-test statistical methods. Emerging findings showed that the level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is significantly high. It was also shown that males students, students in urban and private schools significantly differ in their attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity, from female students and students in rural and public secondary schools. Based on these findings, it was recommended, amongst others, that all students irrespective of gender, school type and school location should be properly counselled by both teachers and professional counsellors to develop positive attitudes towards taking tests in schools.

Keywords: *Assessment, Students' attitude, Test-taking, Academic activity, Test, Secondary schools.*

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Highlights of this paper

- The study assessed students' attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools.
- findings showed that secondary school students in Afikpo Education Zone have favourable attitudes towards test-taking.
- it was recommended that students should be properly counselled by both teachers and professional counsellors to develop positive attitudes towards taking tests in schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality education in a society is one of the predictors of the sustainability of a nation's daily activities. Several behaviours including sport, labour, and academic activities can be observed in secondary schools. One of the reasons individuals attend schools is to gain knowledge and as well, apply it for problem-solving or decision-making. However, within the context of the school, the main determinants of cognitive development lie in the academic activities offered in the school system. The quality of students produced by any institution is mostly dependent on the quality or standard of academic activities rendered by the school. Student attitudes are regarded by many researchers as a key factor to be considered when attempting to understand and explain the student achievement in academics (Köğçe *et al.*, 2009; Owan and Robert, 2019).

Test-taking is a very important means of measuring the understanding, comprehension, and performance of students during or after the completion of one or more topics/courses. In the Nigerian perspective, a test is considered very important as it contributes a significant portion to the continuous assessment which will give the overall remark of a student concerning the course/programme completed. Testing can also be used to monitor the progress of students, assess students' prior knowledge and ideas, and identify the weaknesses and strength of individual learners (Lawrence, 2019; Owan *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the importance of test-taking, a keen observation has shown that some students demonstrate unfavourable attitudes toward test-taking. This can be noted by their behaviour such as anxiety, unwillingness to read, reluctance to learn, absence in school, and so on. In contemporary time many students' academic performance has continually declined due to their lackadaisical behaviour towards academic activities in general, and test-taking in particular. This does not appear to be an exception in Afikpo Education Zone where the attitudes of many students towards test-taking and other assessment-related activities have been observed to be weak and inimical to the attainment of secondary schools' goals.

Attitude, as noted by Hogg and Vaughan (2005) is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. Attitudes are seen as more or less positive and encompass emotions, beliefs, values, and behaviour and hence affect the individual way of thinking, acting and behaving which has a lot of implications to teaching and learning (Cherry, 2013). The attitudes displayed by students towards test-taking in particular and academic activities, in general, may affect their learning processes. It is important to consider the fact that learners can mainly contribute to their learning outcomes as a result of their beliefs and perceptions about the events bordering around a subject matter, school activity, or both.

Some other studies noted that the attitudes of students towards test-taking as an academic activity is positive (Saleh and Ibnian, 2017). Though Famogbiyele (2017) found that Nigerian students had moderately high positive attitudes toward learning English, they were not motivated to study it. Anghelache (2013) averred that students react differently to school tasks: some lay stress on involvement for successful educational outcomes, while others believe that success can be achieved in other ways as well. The overall mean of attitudes of public and private schools' students towards test-taking is positive; however, the results indicated that students of private schools have more positive attitudes towards test-taking than students of public school (Imasuen, 2016; Saleh and Ibnian, 2017).

Ukobong (2015) found that attitude and gender difference have a significant impact on the performance of students in mathematics. Ramos-Galarzal *et al.* (2018) in a quantitative analysis uncovered that there is a statistically significant difference when comparing attitudes towards test-taking between the two groups of participants, where women were more favourable than men. Imasuen (2016) revealed that there is a difference between the attitude of male and female students in mathematics. Yıldız and Kızıldaş (2018) argued that the attitudes of female students toward school are more positive than those of male students. However, variety of studies have found that gender differences do not affect the attitudes of students towards academic activities (Ocak, 2006; Fatoba and Aladejana, 2014; Chemutai, 2015; Asare *et al.*, 2018; Asiri, 2018). Another study further showed that gender did not influence the achievement of students in inferring word meanings in reading comprehension in English language (Akinwumi, 2017).

The literature on school location suggests that it has a role to play in the attitudes of students towards test-taking. Akinwumi (2017) discovered that school location affects the achievement of students' in reading comprehension and in inferring word meanings, especially in urban schools. Sarfo *et al.* (2011) supported that students from urban areas have positive attitudes towards technology than students from rural areas. Although some studies disagreed and argued that students' in rural regions are significantly not different from their urban counterparts (Ünlü *et al.*, 2014; Ohakamike-Obeka, 2016). Ntibi and Edoho (2017) observed that there is no significant difference in the performance between urban and rural school students with a positive attitude towards mathematics and basic science. Yıldız and Kızıldaş (2018) documented that there is a moderate significant relation between students' attitudes toward the school and attitudes toward reading.

The present study was undertaken to fill the gaps currently in the literature where it seems only a handful of studies have focused on students' attitudes towards test-taking as an activity. Previous researches have studied students' attitudes toward learning or academic activities in general. Available literature also suggested to the researchers that the majority of the studies in related areas were more of the foreign origin. Within the context of the Nigerian literature, there seems to be a paucity of research evidence on students' attitudes towards test-taking.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess students' attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. This study specifically sought to assess:

- i. The level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity.
- ii. Students' gender and attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity.
- iii. School type and students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity.
- iv. School location and students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity.

1.2. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

- i. *The level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is not significantly high.*
- ii. *Male students do not differ significantly from female students in their attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools.*
- iii. *There is no significant difference in the attitudes of private and public secondary school students towards test-taking.*
- iv. *There is no significant difference in the attitudes of urban and rural secondary school students towards test-taking.*

2. METHODS

This study adopted the ex-post facto research design. This design was considered suitable for this study due to the manifestation of students' attitudes towards test-taking that has already occurred in the population. Since no further manipulations can be made, the study was designed to study students' attitudes towards test-taking in retrospect through the use of questionnaire. The population of this study consisted of 12,763 secondary school students distributed across 43 public and 71 private secondary schools in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The public secondary schools have a population of 7851 students while the private secondary schools have a population of 4912 students.

Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed in selecting 10% each from the public and private schools respectively. A total of 785 and 491 students were eventually selected from the public and private schools respectively, resulting in an overall sample of 1,276 students. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire tagged: Students' Attitudes towards Test-Taking Questionnaire (SATTQ). The questionnaire was divided into sections A (which elicited the demographic data of students such as age, gender, school location, and school type) and section B (which was structured with 15 items arranged on a four Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree). The 15 items were all measuring students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity.

The instrument was validated by three psychometric experts in test and measurement unit, Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha reliability technique. The reliability coefficient of .893 for the instrument implies that the instrument was internally consistent in achieving the objectives of the study. Copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents by the researchers. The data obtained from the participants were coded, scored, and analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. All the null hypotheses were all tested at .05 level of significance using population t-test and independent t-test statistical methods (where applicable). The results of the analyses are presented in the following section.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Hypothesis One

The level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is not significantly high. This hypothesis was tested at the .05 alpha level using the one sample (population) t-test. This statistical method was considered suitable for testing this hypothesis since only one variable (measured continuously) is involved. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table-1. Population t-test result summary of the level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	SE	t	Sig
Students' attitudes towards test-taking	1276	38.72	13.094	.367	3.316**	.001

Note: **Significant at the .01 alpha level; df= 1275; 1.216; Test value = 37.5; \bar{X} difference = 1.216.

Based on the results presented in Table 1, it was shown that the mean of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is 38.72 which is greater than the test mean value of 37.5 with a mean difference of 1.216. The p-value of .001 is less than the .05 alpha level at 1275 degrees of freedom. This implies that the mean difference of 1.216 is statistically significant leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is retained implying that the level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is significantly high in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

3.2. Hypothesis Two

Male students do not differ significantly from female students in their attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools. The mean of both groups (Male and female) was tested at the .05 level of significance using the independent t-test statistical technique. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table-2. Independent t-test results showing the attitudes of male and female students towards test-taking in secondary schools.

Variables	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	Sig.
Students' attitude towards test-taking	Male	533	47.54	7.959	24.813**	.000
	Female	743	32.39	12.378		

Note: **significant at the .01 alpha level; df= 1274; \bar{X} difference =15.149.

The result presented in Table 2 indicates that the 533 male students had a mean response rate of 47.54 which is higher than the mean response rate of 32.39 obtained by the 743 female students. The mean difference in the response rate of both groups is 15.149. A close look at the p-value of .000 indicates that it is less than the .05 alpha level at 1274 degrees of freedom. Given this result, the null hypothesis earlier stated is rejected. This implies that male students differ significantly from female students in their attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

3.3. Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of private and public secondary school students towards test-taking. This null hypothesis was tested using the independent t-test statistical method at the .05 level of significance. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table-3. Summary of independent t-test result of the attitudes if private and public secondary school students towards test-taking.

Variables	School	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	Sig.
Students' attitude towards test-taking	Private	491	47.54	7.942	22.495**	.000
	Public	785	33.20	12.655		

Note: **Significant at the .01 level; Df= 1274; \bar{X} difference = 14.344.

As presented in Table 3, the result of the analysis indicated that students in private schools had favourable attitudes towards test-taking (N = 491, \bar{X} = 47.54) than those in public secondary schools (N = 785, \bar{X} = 33.20), with a mean difference of 14.344. The p-value of .000 (which is less than the alpha level of .05) suggests that the mean difference of 14.344 is statistically significant at 1274 degrees of freedom. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is upheld. This result implies that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of private and public secondary school students towards test-taking in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

3.4. Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of urban and rural secondary school students towards test-taking. The mean of urban and rural secondary school students was compared using the independent t-test statistical technique and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table-4. Independent t-test results summary showing the attitudes of urban and rural secondary school students towards test-taking.

Variables	School location	N	\bar{X}	SD	T	Sig.
Students' attitude towards test-taking	Urban	598	47.52	7.902	29.078**	.000
	Rural	678	30.95	11.791		

Note: **Significant at the .01 level; df= 1274; \bar{X} difference = 16.567.

The result in Table 4 revealed that the 598 students from urban schools achieved a mean response rate of 47.52 while those from schools located in rural areas (N = 678) achieved a mean response of 30.95. The result indicates that students from schools in urban areas demonstrated better attitudes towards test-taking than those from rural schools with a mean difference of 16.567. A cursory look at the p-value of .000 shows that it is less than the .05 alpha level at 1274 degrees of freedom. Based on these results, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This result implies that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of urban and rural secondary school students towards test-taking in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study showed that the level of students' attitudes towards test-taking as an academic activity in secondary schools is significantly high in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. This finding may have appeared this way since the respondents rated their attitudes and may have either overrated themselves. However, the finding suggests that many students are always prepared to take a test and are not afraid of facing tough questions. Some also indicated that they are comfortable taking a test from teachers they perceive as highly competent. This finding agrees with the results of Saleh and Ibnian (2017) which showed that the attitudes of students towards test-taking as an academic activity is positive. Famogbiyele (2017) also found that Nigerian students had moderately high positive attitudes toward learning English, but were not motivated to study it.

It was established through the second finding of this study that male students differ significantly from female students in their attitudes towards test-taking in secondary schools in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Male students demonstrated favourable attitudes towards test-taking than female students. This finding suggests that a higher proportion of male students are always ready, willing, and motivated to take any test than females. This finding supports the finding of Imasuen (2016) which revealed that there is a difference between the attitude of male and female students in mathematics. However, this finding negates to some extent the finding of Ukobong (2015); Ramos-Galarzal *et al.* (2018) and Yıldız and Kızıldaş (2018) which revealed although that there is a statistically significant difference when comparing attitudes towards test-taking between the two male and female, where women were more favourable than men. In contrast to the finding of this study, some earlier studies showed an indifferent result in attitudes of male and female students towards academic activities (Ocak, 2006; Fatoba and Aladejana, 2014; Chemutai, 2015; Akinwumi, 2017; Asare *et al.*, 2018; Asiri, 2018).

The third finding of this study uncovered that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of private and public secondary school students towards test-taking in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Private school students demonstrated better attitudes towards test-taking than their counterparts in public secondary schools. This finding is unsurprising since in many private schools, the environment is highly conducive for learning and students' progress are frequently monitored. The activities of both teachers and students are consistently monitored thus, reducing unacceptable behaviour from both staff and students. Students in such an environment will develop favourable attitudes towards test-taking and other academic activities than in public secondary schools where it is almost no man's business to regulate students' and teachers' behaviour. This finding corroborates the results of

some previous studies which indicated that students of private schools have more positive attitudes towards test-taking than students of public schools (Imasuen, 2016; Saleh and Ibnian, 2017).

This study also discovered through its fourth finding that there is a significant difference in the attitudes of urban and rural secondary school students towards test-taking in Afikpo Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Students in schools located in urban areas had more positive attitudes towards test-taking than those in rural schools. This finding may have taken this toll due to the uneven distribution of school facilities between urban and rural locations. Students confidence to take a test can be boosted if they fully understand lessons and can demonstrate practically those things they have been taught. Thus, the availability and utilization of school facilities and instructional resources can be used to achieve long-term understanding by students. So, if schools in urban areas are more equipped than those in rural areas, then, one would expect students in such locations to be more confident in test-taking and task performance. This finding aligns with the results of Sarfo *et al.* (2011) which showed that students from urban areas have higher positive attitudes towards technology than students from rural areas. This finding, however, disagrees with the finding of some studies (Ünlü *et al.*, 2014; Ohakamike-Obeka, 2016; Ntibi and Edoho, 2017) which argued that students' in rural regions are significantly not different from their urban counterparts. The variation in the findings may have resulted from the differences in the areas where the studies were conducted.

5. CONCLUSION

It was concluded generally secondary school students in Afikpo Education Zone have favourable attitudes towards test-taking. A higher proportion of the students are always ready and not afraid to take any test at any time. Students' attitudes towards test-taking in the area is significantly high, while factors such as gender, school location, and school type significantly influence students' attitude towards test-taking. The implication of this finding suggests that male students and students' in urban as well as private secondary schools have more favourable attitudes than female students, students in rural and public secondary schools.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions reached in this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. All students irrespective of gender should be properly counselled by both teachers and professional counsellors to develop positive attitudes taking tests in schools.
- ii. Schools in both urban and rural areas should be evenly supplied with school material resources, infrastructure, and regular supervision. This will help provide an enabling environment for students to find lessons interesting and be willing to take assessment whenever they are presented.
- iii. The government at all levels should consistently motivate teachers in public secondary to enable them to discharge their duties effectively and reduce students' test anxiety on the path of students in public schools.
- iv. Parents should also monitor the progress of students in schools and support their education at all times. This will create an awareness in the students that their academic performance is monitored and can make them sit up and be well-prepared to take test or examination.
- v. Students should be encouraged to read their books and improve the quality of their study habits. This will help build students' self-confidence before taking tests, making them demonstrate good attitudes towards test-taking.

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