

# Expectancy Beliefs and English Language Performance of Secondary Schools Students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria

Alice K. J. Musa\* Kelechukwu I. Nwachukwu Domiya Geoffrey Ali  
Department of Education, University of Maiduguri, P. M. B.1069, Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

## Abstract

The study determined Relationship between Students' Expectancy Beliefs and English Language Performance of Students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria. Correlation design was adopted for the study. Four hypotheses which determined the relationships between the components of expectancy beliefs: ability, tasks difficulty, and past experience beliefs, and performance in English Language and the difference among these components in explaining the variance of English Language performance were tested. A sample of 400 (192 males and 208 females) SS II students from 8 secondary schools, participated in the study. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling. Ability Self-Perceptions Instrument (ASPI), with a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient reliability of .96, and students' end of session results in English Language were used to collect the data. Multiple regressions were used to analyse the data. The results revealed significant relationship between ability, task difficulty and past experience beliefs and academic performance in English Language respectively. Task difficulty and past experience beliefs contributed significantly to the variance of performance in English Language whereas ability belief does not make a significant contribution. Recommendations were highlight for teachers and school counsellors.

**Keywords:** Expectancy Beliefs, English Language, Performance, Students, Secondary Schools, Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

There are many psychological variables that explain students' variance in academic performance such as their intelligence, perception, attitudes, self-esteem and so forth. While some learners find it easy to engage in their learning and gain good performance in their academic undertakings, some find it difficult to do so and often perform poorly academically regardless of their levels of intellectual abilities. Such differences could be explained by learners' belief on probability (Expectancy) of success in learning task which may underpin differences in choice, effort and other achievement-related behaviour of such learners. Atkinson (1957) explains that the strength of expectancy (subjective probability) that success will be the consequence of a particular activity is a significant determinant of tendency to engage in a task. Expectancy beliefs refers to individuals' beliefs about how well they will do on a task (Eccles & Wigfield 1983)

Expectancy beliefs comprises of three components: ability belief, task difficulty belief and past experience belief. Past experience underpins task difficult belief and ability belief. Ability belief refers to individuals 'evaluations of his competence on a task (Eccles & Wigfield, 1983). It is conceived as broad beliefs about competence in a given domain. In forming ability belief in English Language, the student will answer such questions as "Will I be able to tackle English Language task effectively?" Have I experience success in my past endeavours with difficult tasks? Students will likely develop positive or negative ability belief depending on past experience of success or failure on English Language tasks among other psychological and social factors. Eccles and Wigfield (1983) explained beliefs about ability as individuals' evaluations of their competence on a task. Task difficulty refers to how easy or difficult the student assesses the learning task to be. When students perceive learning task to be too difficult, it may cause the students to develop negative belief about their abilities thereby discouraging attitudes towards attempting the task. However, the reverse will be the students' attitudes, if they perceive the leaning task to be of moderate challenge.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework

Expectancy- Value Beliefs Model of Eccles and Wigfield (1983) is used as theoretical basis of this study. The theory explains how beliefs and perceptions about self and task predict individual differences in achievement. As a motivational theory, Expectancy-value belief seeks to determine forces driving human achievement behaviour in individuals which explains their different achievements. The basic assumption of Eccles and Wigfield is that among factors influencing choice, effort and persistence necessary for human achievement behaviour, is individuals' belief on expectancy of success and value of success in the learning task. According to the theory, students' beliefs on their probabilities of success and worth of success go a long way to determine such students' choices of academic tasks (course, field, and specialization) persistence and performance on such tasks. Thus, the student may lack motivation to venture into learning tasks when expectancy of success is due low as a result of subjective perceived lack of ability for the tasks, difficulty of the tasks perceived as well as worthlessness of

the success.

The study focussed on the Expectancy Belief aspect of the theory; specifically on how students' beliefs on their expectancy of success in English Language learning tasks contribute to their performance in English Language. Bringing the forgoing to bear on the study, performance of students in English Language within Maiduguri Metropolis may be related to students' perceived probability (expectancy) of success in English language. Hence, students' beliefs in their abilities to engage in English Language Learning and their assessment of the tasks to be of moderate difficulty will motivate them to engage in the tasks while the reverse is the case if they perceive they do not have the ability and that the tasks are too difficult.

Students' perception of their ability to excel in a learning task contributes in determining their choices, effort level and persistence on the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 1983). Examining the various cognitive variables capable of influencing academic performance, Wankowski (1973) reported that ability self-confidence of students among other prevailing factors, contributes significantly to the students' academic performance. Similarly, Al-methen and Wilkinson (1992) posited that success or failure could be influenced by students' confidence in their abilities and this in turn could affect their levels of activity in the classroom. Both researchers stressed that students' academic problems are underpin by their personal perception of ability and self-concept. Specifically, as it concerns this study, students who believe themselves to have the competency required for successful performance in English Language are likely to perform better than their counterparts with perceived low ability belief on the tasks.

Gist and Mitchell (1992) explained that expectancy, specifically of ability belief, applies to a variety of contexts and is a good predictor of performance and behaviour. Bandura (1978) explains that students' ability beliefs about tasks determine their behaviours, persistence and performance on the tasks. In other words, the stronger the student's ability belief, the more persistent the student becomes when faced with a difficult task, while weak ability self-belief tends to reduce the student's stamina to persist on the task or even make the student working on the task to quit. Docharms (1996) observes that intervention procedures designed to raise students' confidence in their ability in a particular subject area actually induce an upward leap in those students' subsequent performance. Docharms therefore submitted that increase in ability belief produces increases in academic performance.

Madu (2002) examined expectancy beliefs and academic performance in English Language of secondary school students in Jos, Plateau State with a sample of 400 students drawn from 8 schools, using Instrument for Students' Ability Belief in English Language (ISABE) and English Language results (WAEC) and found that students with high ability belief in English Language performed better than students with low ability belief.

Nebo (2007) examined perceived task difficulty, speed of response and performance in English Language among nursing students in Lokoja, Nigeria. Nebo administered task difficulty perception tests, using stop watch to regulate response time and found that students with low task difficulty belief in English Language were observed to spend less time on tasks and yet performed better than their peers with high task difficulty belief. Corroborating Nebo, Adedoyin's (2009) study reported relationship between past performance and expectancy belief in English language. In the study, Adedoyin sampled 260 junior secondary students' drawn from 7 schools in Akure Metropolis. The students responded to Mathematics and English Language Expectancy Instrument (MELEI) before sitting for a mock examination on English and Mathematics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the data. The result showed significant positive relationship between past experience of students and expectancy of success in English Language and Mathematics.

Similarly, Nwabufo (2010) conducted a study on relationship between students' ability belief, task difficulty and academic performance in English language with a sample of 800 students drawn from 15 junior secondary schools in Owerri. The instruments used were English Language Ability Belief Instruments (ELABI), which measured students' perception of their individual ability and English Language test in comprehension, oral and register. It was found that there was statistically significant positive correlation between ability belief and performance in English language. The students' ability belief in English language influenced performance on their test of comprehension, oral and registers.

Edem (2011) reported students' ability belief to be a strong factor in anxiety behaviour and performance of students in senior school certificate examination. Edem's study probed relationship between English Language ability belief, anxiety and academic performance of students preparing for Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Akwa Ibom State with a sample of 380 students drawn from 9 schools in Uyo. English Language Ability Belief and Examination Anxiety Instrument (ELABEAI) were administered to the participants who were also assessed on English Language with past West African Examination Council (WAEC) question paper. Edem observed that students who rated low on perceived ability belief in English Language dominated the rank which exhibited anxiety behaviour. Results indicated significant positive correlation between students' ability belief and academic performance in English Language. About 65% of students who

made “A” and “B” level passes rated high on perceived ability scale

On the contrary, some researchers have reported a weak correlation between perceived ability belief and academic performance. Norman and Percy (2009) studied the relationship between students’ ability beliefs, self-esteem and academic achievement. A sample of 255 year one English Students participated in the study. They used Students Perceived Ability Questionnaire (SPAQ) and found weak significant correlation between academic achievement and ability beliefs of the students. Amos (2011) investigated the influence of students’ ability belief on reading comprehension performance using a sample of 1,274 senior secondary three students (SS3) from public schools in Cross River State, Nigeria using instrument for Measuring Teachers’ and Students’ Variables (IMTSV) and Reading comprehension test (RCT) for data collection. Data collated was analysed using independent t-test. The results revealed that students’ ability belief did not significantly contribute to their reading comprehension performance.

Some studies reported that ability belief is not a significant predictor of academic performance in English language (Kluag & Koon, 2003, Cho, 2011). Cho reported that students’ ability belief is not a significant predictor of students’ term grade. Kluag & Koon, (2003) examined the relationship between students’ ability belief and their performance in English Language using a sample of 1,600 class five students in Hong-Kong. They found that majority of the students who rated low in their ability belief test were actually at the same level with some of the students who rated high on perceived ability, while some students who were confident of their ability actually performed very low. Hence, they attributed cases where high ability belief correlated with high performance in English to chance.

With the two sides of argument debate on whether ability belief predicts academic performance in English Language, some researchers argued from the reverse. That instead of ability belief predicting academic performance, it is academic performance that actually helps students to form their ability beliefs in a learning situation. Such researchers include Calsyn and Kenny (2007) who reported academic performance to be a determinant of self-concept of ability. They submitted that when a learner performs well in English Language, the learner will develop a positive ability belief while consistent poor performance may lead to the development of negative /low ability belief.

### **1.3. The Context of the Study.**

Borno State is one of the educationally disadvantage states in Nigeria characterised with poor performance of students in English Language. Reviews of studies have shown the importance of students’ expectancy beliefs in underpinning their levels of performance in English Language. There have been many studies on the relationship between expectancy-beliefs and students’ performance in English Language in the Western world and other some parts of Nigeria. However, there tend be little if any empirical studies on the influence of expectancy beliefs perspective on academic achievement of students in English Language in Maiduguri and Borno State as a whole. The study therefore determined relationship between students’ Expectancy Beliefs and performance in English Language of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria.

### **1.4. The Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to determine four things. (1) Relationship between students’ English language ability belief and academic performance in English Language. (2) Relationship between task difficulty belief and academic performance in English Language. (3) Relationship between students’ past experience belief and academic performance in English language. (4) Significant difference in the contributions of ability belief, task difficulty belief and past experience belief to the variance of performance of students in English language

### **1.5. Hypotheses.**

Four Hypotheses Guided the Study.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between students’ English language ability belief and academic performance in English Language

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between students’ English language task difficulty belief and academic Performance in English Language

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between students’ past experience belief and academic Performance in English language.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the contributions of ability, task difficulty and past experience beliefs to variance of academic performance in English Language.

## **2.0. Method**

### **2.1. Design and Participants**

The study used correlational design to determine the relationship between expectancy belief and English

Language performance of students. Population and geographical scope of the study is 4,514 Senior Secondary Schools II (Class 5) students within Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. A sample of 400 (192 males and 208 females) SS II students from 8 secondary schools, participated in the study. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique. To ensure equal representation of students from all types of schools, the schools in the Metropolis were first stratified into day and boarding schools where four schools were randomly selected from each stratum, and then it was stratified into co-education and single sex schools where four schools were also randomly selected from the stratum, after which the sample was drawn randomly.

## 2.2. Research Instruments

Two instruments were used for the study (1). Ability Self-Perceptions and Subjective Task Value Scale (ASPSTV) was used to measure expectancy beliefs of students. The Scale was patterned after Eccles and Wigfield (2000) instrument (2). Student's 3rd term result in English language was used to measure their academic performance in English language. The ASPSTV consists of sections "A" and "B". Section A contains the demographic information of the participants while section B measures the components of expectancy-value beliefs. The items are in Likert type scale with (5) rating responses; strongly Agree-SA (5), Agree-A (4), Undecided-U (3), Disagree-DA (2), Strongly Disagree-SD (1). The instrument consists of 46 items covering the components of expectancy belief (20 items) and value belief (26 items).

Only the expectancy beliefs aspect of the ASPSTV was used for the study. It is called Ability Self-Perceptions Instrument (ASPI). It is divided into three sub-scales measuring the three components of expectancy beliefs: ability belief (7 items), task difficulty belief (7 items), past experience (6 items). The instrument was pilot tested with SSII students of a school within the University where 50 students participated in the pilot testing. It has a Cronbach Alpha coefficient reliability of .96, and .81, .70. and .82 for the sub-scales: ability belief, task difficulty and past experience respectively

## 2.3. Method of Data Analysis

Multiple regressions were used for data analysis. Pallant (2001) explained that Multiple Regression is a correlation technique used to determine relationship among a dependent variable and several independent variables. Multiple regressions is considered appropriate for the study since the researchers are interested in determining the relationship between a dependent variable (academic performance) and several independent variables (expectancy beliefs). The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## 3.1. Results

The results of the study are presented in tables followed by their interpretations

Table 1 .Correlation Matrix of Relationships among Expectancy Belief Components and Academic Performance in English Language

	Ability Belief	Task Difficulty	Past Experience	Eng. Performance	Lang Performance
Ability belief	1				
Task Diff. belief	.749**	1			
Past Exp. belief	.779**	.750**	1		
Eng. Lang. Performance	.647**	.610**	.659**	1	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed), N 400

Table 1 presents correlation matrix for the components of expectancy beliefs and academic performance in English Language of senior secondary school students in Maiduguri metropolitan. From the correlation table 1, there is statistical significant correlation between ability belief and academic performance ( $r = .647, p = .000$ ), task difficulty belief and academic performance ( $r = .61, p = .000$ ), past experience and academic performance ( $r = .65, p = .000$ ).

Table 2. ANOVA: Interrelationship among the Variables Ability Belief, Task Difficulty, Past Experience and Performance in English Language

Model 1	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	155318.900	3	22188.414	334.365	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	26013.060	392	66.360		
Total	181331.960	399			

a. Dependent variable: English Language Performance

b. Predictors: constant. TOTAL ability belief, TOTAL task difficulty, TOTAL past experience

The ANOVA table 2 showed that the model which consists of ability belief, task difficulty, past experience and performance in English Language, is statistically significant [ $F(3, 392, 399) = 334.365, p = .000$ ];

meaning the variables inter-relate. The summary model shown on table 3 revealed that the model explains 86% (R Square .857 X 100),  $p = .000$  of the variance of performance in English language.

Table3. Model Summary: Correlation between Expectancy-Beliefs and Performance in English Language

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig change	F change
<b>1</b>	.925 <sup>a</sup>	.857	.854	8.14616	.857	334.365	3	392	.000	

a. Predictors: constant, TOTAL ability belief, TOTAL task difficulty, TOTAL past experience

b. Dependent variable: English Language Performance

Table 4. Coefficient: Differences in the Contributions of Expectancy Beliefs Components to the Variance of English Language Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	-3.274	3.400			-.963	.336
Ability belief.	.166	.169	.034		.979	.328
Task diff.		.105	.172		5.178	.000
Past exp.		.177	-.105		-2.499	.013

\*Dependent variable: English Language performance

Table 4 revealed the contribution of each of the components of the expectancy beliefs to the variance of performance in English Language. The variables with the most statistical significant contributions to the variance of English Language performance is task difficulty belief 17.2% ( $\beta = .172 \times 100$ ),  $t = 5.178$ ,  $P = .000$  followed by past experience belief 11% ( $\beta = .105 \times 100$ ),  $t = -2.499$ ,  $p = .013$ . However, ability belief does not make any statistical significant contribution 3.4% ( $\beta = .034$ ),  $t = .979$ ,  $p = .328$  to the variance of English Language performance.

### 3.2. Discussions

The study found that ability belief, task difficulty belief and past experience belief significantly relate to students' academic performance in English Language. These findings corroborate reports of previous studies Wankowski (1973), Edem (2002), Nebo (2007), Adedoyin's (2009), Nwabufo (2010) and Madu (2011), that ability belief, task belief and past experience belief each related with academic performance in English Language. It also supports the reports of Al-Methen and Wilkinson (1992) that success or failure could be influenced by students' confidence in their abilities; Docharms (1996) that intervention procedures designed to raise students' confidence in their ability actually induced an upward leap in subsequent performance and Lowento, Santoso, and Liu's (2012) report that expectancy for success positively relates to academic performance. Docharms submitted that increase in ability belief produces increases in academic performance.

The study also found that Expectancy Belief, as a model, significantly explains the variance of academic performance in English Language. However when the individual contribution of the components of the model are examined, only task difficulty belief and past experience belief contributed statistically significantly to the variance of performance in English Language but ability belief does not statistically contribute significantly. The later finding corroborates the reports of Kluag and Koon (2003), Calsyn and Kenny (2007), Norman and Percy (2009), Amos (2011), (Cho 2011), that ability belief is not a significant predictor of performance in English Language whereas the former findings corroborates Adedoyin's (2009) report that past experience is a predictor of English performance and Nebo (2007) who report that students with perceived low task difficulty belief in English Language were observed to spend less time on tasks and yet performed better than their peers with high task difficulty belief

It is worthy of note that findings of this study confirmed the theoretical framework (Expectancy-Value belief by Eccles & Wigfield (1983)) which posited that learner's performance is underpinned by the individual's expectancy beliefs components. This study found the components of Expectancy belief to be positively related to learner's academic performance.

The findings of this study tend to agree with most of the local studies reviewed. This could be as a result of similarity in socio-cultural factors playing concomitant roles in the students' academic behaviours within a given area. However, the differences in the findings of this and the previous studies could be attributed to the measures of academic performance in English Language used in the studies While this study used past record of students' performance in their school examinations as the measure of their performance in English

Language, previous studies like Nebo (2007) and Adedoyin's (2009) administered examination in Language language, Other factors that may explain the variation in the findings of the present study and other studies reviewed could also be family background, socialisers' influence, school types and differences in categories of students (such as junior secondary school students, senior secondary school students and nursing students). Eccles and Wigfield (1983) posited that socialiser's orientation and cultural beliefs may underpin difference in perception of self-ability and value of success in a task.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship between Expectancy Beliefs and academic performance in English Language of secondary school students in Maiduguri, Borno state. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that expectancy beliefs, a psychological variable, significantly relates with performance in English Language of students in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State. It also explains the variance in English Language performance of students in Maiduguri Metropolis; although students' perceptions of task difficulty and past experience beliefs are the significant factors whereas ability belief is not a significant factor. The findings have great implications for classroom practice and further research.

#### 4.2. Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers should plan their scheme of works from simple to complex, known to unknown and also plan teaching and deliver lessons with learning tasks of moderate challenges and enough activities and exercises to give students practice on the lessons learnt. This will enable students to have confidence in their abilities to engage on the learning tasks as well as experience success in their engagement which will further serves as motivation for further engagement in their learning. Secondly, teachers should give students quick feedback on their performance as well as point out clearly to them where they have problems and guide them on how to solve the problems. Teachers should avoid the use of detrimental remarks, especially on students' negative experiences in learning so as to help them have confidence in their abilities.

Some students may experience exaggerated fear of English Language because of its position in determining the progress of students in their learning and for gaining admission into tertiary institution for the pursuant of their desired careers. Such kind of fear may arise when students experience constant failure as a result of poor background which may likely make them have wrong beliefs about their ability and confidence to perform well in English Language. Teachers should indentify students with poor background in English Language and give them remediation lessons to bridge the gap. This will help also in eliminating anxiety especially with reference to task difficulty and past experience beliefs. Teachers and counsellors also have a role to play towards desensitizing such fear through counselling and shaping students' behaviour toward challenging tasks so as to overcome such fear and attain mastery of the learning tasks

Teachers and school counsellors can give students general lectures and counselling on the influence of students expectancy beliefs motivation on their performance and give them tips on how to overcome exaggerated perceptions of ability, task difficulty and past experience beliefs that may be undermining their good performance.

The study has the following weaknesses. It did not consider the effect of gender on the relationship between expectancy- beliefs and performance in English Language. Secondly, it did not consider the value aspect of the Expectancy-Value Beliefs model of achievement motivation. It is recommended that researchers wishing to replicate the study incorporate these weaknesses into their studies

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