

**SEXUAL PREDATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) INDUSTRY: FEMALE LEARNERS' RESPONSES FROM SOME ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

*This investigation explored sexual predation in the English Language Teaching Industry in West Africa over the past ten years. The Study focused on females learning the English language and looked to examine their responses to the issue. The participants were one hundred and fifty (150) female students from five English Departments in the Francophone area. We conducted the study following an ethnographic research tradition. The results showed that many female respondents suffered some form of sexual harassment from a lecturer during their studies. Moreover, there are various interlocked factors which work together to cause educator sexual misconduct. However, participants differ in their reactions and responses. Some of the respondents were not sure of what sexual predation stood for. The researcher suggests a series of training sessions for teachers and students to discourage and eradicate gender bias from the ELT Industry.*

**Keywords:** sex, predation, female students, ELT Industry, West Africa, gender bias.

**Résumé**

Cette étude est une analyse des réactions des étudiantes à la prédation sexuelle dans l'industrie de l'enseignement de l'anglais en Afrique de l'Ouest au cours des dix dernières années. Les participantes sont cent cinquante (150) étudiantes de cinq départements d'anglais de la région francophone d'Afrique. L'étude conduite selon une tradition de recherche ethnographique a montré que beaucoup d'apprenantes sont soumises à une forme d'harcèlement sexuel et de nombreux facteurs interdépendants concourent à une inconduite sexuelle de la part de l'éducateur. Cependant, la majorité des participantes sont ignorantes d'harcèlement sexuel et en conséquence ne prennent aucune mesure. L'étude

suggère une série de formations pour enseignants et apprenants afin de décourager et éliminer le harcèlement sexuel de l'industrie de l'enseignement de l'anglais.

**Mots Clés :** Prédation sexuelle, industrie de l'enseignement de l'anglais, universités francophones, Afrique de l'ouest.

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## **Introduction**

English language learning has been the field of interest of many female students as a career choice in Francophone Western Africa. However, there are often many obstacles. Sexual predation is a burning issue and is usually entirely ignored. Sexual predation is a longstanding obstacle in the higher educational institutions in Africa. The problem of sexual harassment within academic settings has been identified and examined in several studies; for example, Amanda (2016) explored transactional sex and sexual harassment between professors and students at an urban university in Benin in West Africa.

Although harassment of superiors within an organization by subordinates, such as a student harassing a professor is possible (Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Gold, & Ormerod, 1988; Matchen & DeSouza, 2000), it is more often the case that higher-ranking individuals use their position of power to obtain sexual favours from lower-ranking individuals, rather than the other way around. According to Dziech and Weiner (1984), between 20% and 30% of women suffered some form of sexual harassment from a professor during their university career. The existence of sexual harassment in academics, and the seriousness of its consequences, interfere with the educational and career-building pursuits of women. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. Shoop (2004) defines this behaviour as 'educator sexual exploitation.'

Gender inequality is the cause of 'Educator sexual misconduct' prohibited by law. Even so, such behaviour persists, and victims often do little to end the harassment. Although some countries appear to be grappling with the issue more seriously than before, reports about 'Educator sexual misconduct' keep coming. The recurrent complaint heard from female students in educational institutions relates to oppression based on their gender.

However, factors associated with globalization, understood as the combination of economic integration, technological diffusion, and greater access to information, have operated through markets, formal institutions (schools), and informal institutions to lift some of the constraints to greater gender equality (World Development Report, 2012). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

4 and 5 focus on quality education and reducing gender inequality, respectively. Progress toward these goals requires a complete understanding of current global patterns in learning and grade attainment.

This project examines female students' responses to 'Educator Sexual Misconduct' in some English Departments at some Francophone African Universities over the past ten years. It is structured around five points: the literature review; the objectives; the methodology; the results/discussion; and the conclusion.

## **1. A Review of Literature**

As briefly mentioned in the introduction of this paper, our investigation field is not an unthreaded land. We now report some relevant studies in the area. Compared to male students, female students are less likely to pursue their studies in higher institution to earn degrees. They are more likely to quit their programme before completion (Leonard 2001; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). One of the factors creating these gaps involves unequal sexual relationships. (William et al., 1984., Toews et al., 1993; Raddon., 2002; Brauer et al., 2003; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Dialogue about predation in institutions of higher learning has amplified over the past few years, but no tangible actions to end the scourge have materialized. A 2017 study by the Female Students Network Trust revealed that 74% of female students in tertiary institutions had been subjected to sexual harassment by male staffers at campuses. In the higher educational institutions, where students are of legal age to consent, sexual relationships between professors and students are not expressly forbidden. A student who dates a professor can expect good grades in all her classes. These relationships start appearing at a much earlier age (Sene, 2010). Female university students have compelling reasons to accept or even pursue such relationships with their male teachers despite the associated stigma.

Given the power dynamics at play in a classroom setting, a relationship between a male teacher and his female student cannot be entirely free of coercion. The apparent power differential underpinning the transaction simultaneously creates the potential for sexual harassment, which consists of 'unwanted advances made under pressure of any form, in which the ultimate goal is to obtain favours of a sexual nature in a relationship of authority between the perpetrator and the victim' (Benin Parliament 2006, 1). Thus, an instructor's position of authority over his student gives rise to the possibility for harassment, and we could argue that in teacher-student sexual relationships, a degree of pressure is always

implicit even if not intended by the professor (Sene 2010). In Africa, the gender system is socially constructed and educational institutions, along with the family, create and enforce expectations about how women and men should behave in societies. Although the rules vary from one culture to another in Africa, most of them are rooted in patriarchy, the control of women by men (Humm, 2004). Faludi (1991) believes that improvements in women's lives are dependent not just on women themselves but on men changing the way they behave.

## **2. Objectives: Research Questions**

The goal of this study is to discover whether there is any sexual predation in the English language teaching industry and to examine female students' perceptions. Therefore, we put forth the following research questions:

- Why does 'educator sexual misconduct' occur in the context under investigation?
- What does sexual predation mean to the participating female students in the context under investigation?

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Participants**

The participants in this study were one hundred and fifty (150) female students reading English from five English departments of five universities in West Africa: An English Department in Benin, an English Department in Togo, another English Department in Côte d'Ivoire, an English Department in Senegal and another one Burkina-Faso. We purposely identified the target sample for this study's population. This procedure helps the researcher to select participants who fulfil a certain number of criteria (Creswell, 2007). We chose the five English departments because we have some connections (colleagues and past students) in the selected universities to facilitate the investigation. One hundred (100) of the participants are Bachelor students, twenty-five (25) are Master students and twenty-five (25) others are Doctoral students. The imbalance results from the fact that there are more students in the bachelor program than the other programs. Table 1 provides more details on the distribution of the participants. This sampling is stratified to be representative of the sexes and all categories and fields and activities.

**Table 1: Distribution of Participants in the Five Selected English Departments**

English Departments	Number of participants	Age			level		
		≤ 17	18-29)	> 29	Bachelor	Master	Doctorate
A	30	7	15	8	20	5	5
B	30				20	5	5
C	30				20	5	5
D	30				20	5	5
E	30				20	5	5

### **3.2 Instruments**

This study followed an ethnographic research tradition. The data collection was mainly through a uniform questionnaire addressed to 150 female participants and unstructured interviews of 20 participants selected from the 150 respondents. The questionnaire included ten questions. The first two questions pertained to general information: the students' age, institution, level, and grade. The remaining questions focused on their experiences and opinions on the issue under consideration. The process revolved around a series of two consecutive interview sessions with each student. Participation was voluntary, and we took appropriate steps to secure the consent of the female respondents. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were open-ended and presented as casual conversations to encourage the participants to talk freely about what they understood by sexual predation in their own terms. Some descriptive questions were asked at the beginning to get them started with the talking. As the interview went on, some basic and contrast questions followed. These questions emerged from what the respondent learners said. We analysed the data collected to identify patterns representing respondents' opinions about sexual harassment, relations with their instructors, and the influence of these practices on their studies.

## **4. Results**

The outcomes of the survey fall under two headings: (1) factors responsible for educator sexual misconduct in the selected English departments (2) female students' responses to sexual predation in the context under investigation.

### **4.1. Factors responsible for educator sexual misconduct in the case study**

There are various interlocked factors which work together to cause educator sexual misconduct in the selected English departments. The following are the constraints, most of which emerged from the narratives of respondents' learning experiences and questionnaire:

- **Power differentials and gender inequality**

The classroom is a setting for the reproduction of power and gender dynamics, in which the teacher acts as the possessor of knowledge he imparts to students. In university settings, this dynamic is further encouraged when the vast majority of teachers are male. In the departments where we conducted the study, more than 80 % of all lecturers are men. The most striking aspect is the absence of female teachers. Generally, males prevail among tertiary institution teachers. A lecturer's position of authority over his student gives rise to the possibility for harassment and predation. Because they hold a doctorate and a steady salary, lecturers are almost always of higher social and economic status than their students. This power differential forms the basis for sexual harassment which according to the five countries' laws, is defined as unwanted advances made under pressure of any form, in which the ultimate goal is to obtain favours of a sexual nature in a relationship of authority between the male perpetrator and the female victim. Thus, a lecturer's position of power over his student gives rise to the possibility of sexual predation.

- **The constraint of available financial resources**

The lack of financial support is among the root causes of sexual harassment in the context under investigation. Female respondents in this study experience daily stress in meeting their basic needs, such as obtaining food, shelter, transportation or clothing. Some of the female parents would encourage and almost push their daughters into such relationships by not providing their daughters with financial support. The female students become more dependent

on others for survival and, therefore, less able to control their vulnerability to demands for sex.

Sexual harassment is due to students' financial needs. It's challenging for some of the respondent girls to go to university. And it is also tough for them to ask for help. When they ask someone for help, he is perhaps going to ask for sexual compensation. According to the World Health Organization's World Report on Violence and Health, poverty increases one's vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation in the workplace and schools (Krug et al., 2002).

More, female students often expect to benefit materially from their romantic relationships, valuing this benefit as a sign of a partner's investment and viability. Female students who lack sufficient economic resources to meet their basic needs may have to resort to bartering for essential goods via granting sexual favours (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). The study revealed that some female students date lecturers for access opportunities, even if they know that the lecturer is already married. Because of the economic situation, there are not many male students with the means to give them what they want. These young women are not dating lecturers in pursuit of a husband. As Honwana (2013) points out, we must understand these relationships in the context of chronic unemployment. There is an undeniable connection between poverty and sexual predation. The lecturers act as gatekeepers to scarce resources. The fact of entering into such relationships provides female students with a level of emotional and financial protection.

#### ▪ **Grades**

The survey results revealed that some instructors offer to pass female students in their examinations in return for sex - which is professionally unacceptable. The investigation showed that respondent students have compelling reasons to accept or even pursue such relationships with their male teachers, as above. Another of these motives is grade. A student who enters into a sexual relationship with a teacher can expect good grades in all of her classes. Hunter (2002) explains that the active participation of female students in such rapports is for personal benefit. Relatedly, a degree of pressure is always implicit even if not intended by the professor (Sene 2010). Respondent doctoral students in the study had difficulty with doctoral supervision. They pointed to the fact that some of the supervisors were ready to pass the female doctoral student if she accepted

she would need to offer sex. In that connection, Paula, one of the informants, said:

*I went to the office of my supervisor one day, and all that I could notice is that he closed the office door and started engaging me into romance and I protested... Since then, my relationship with my supervisor became difficult, and he made the task very difficult for me to achieve my doctorate. (Paula)*

The survey indicates that there was a high concordance between sexual harassment and grade. Sexual predation affects students' grades seriously, and they are obliged 'to play the game.' Dossi, a student in a Bachelor degree class, declared:

*I remembered the lecturer who failed me on a course I loved so much. I knew that wasn't my score. When I went to him to dispute the result, he said, "so now I finally have your attention".*

- **Forgiving bad behaviour**

Sexual harassment is prohibited by law in the countries where we conducted the investigation. Even so, such behaviour persists. The majority of the victims we investigated do not know where to report the incidents; some do not report the episodes at all and choose to ignore the behaviour, or do nothing. The survey showed that of the 150 female students who participated in the study, only three reported the incident of sexual harassment to the perpetrator's superior, and only five reported it to another professor: the rest of participants did nothing about it. More than this, the study showed that the victims' parents and society are also part of the 'game.' They often do little to end the harassment. The departments under investigation are not playing their role either. They do not prevent or take action against sexual predation by teachers. Students complain that most of the time, their departments ignore female students' complaints about being sexually harassed. In some unfortunate ways, then, female respondents have compelling reasons to accept or even pursue such relationships with their male professors, despite the law against the practice and the associated stigma.

- **Lack of Motivation and Ambition:**

Students in the context under investigation are required to study English in a social environment where there is little immediate need or opportunity to use the language for communicative purposes. For this reason, it is easy to speculate that the motivation to study English among several of these students is low. Learners



have an unwillingness and lack of motivation to learn English, as they do not see the immediate need to use the language now or in their futures.

Female students' lack of ambition and of motivation to learn and their negative attitude towards the target language make it difficult to adapt to the learning setting and to achieve academic excellence. Accordingly, they are potentially prone to sexual harassment because some female students who are not committed to their study will perhaps resolve to seek some favour. The study indicated that a female student who is not motivated to learn and pass examinations is more likely to be sexually harassed than a diligent female student.

▪ **Revealing outfit**

The investigation also found a belief that the causes of the problem of sexual predation lies in female student individual behaviours or attributes, rather than in the social conditions. The majority of respondent students believed that female students who wear tight or revealing outfits are inviting sexual comments. Men are much more visually oriented than women (Owoaje and Olusola-Taiwo, 2010); so men are most likely to notice if the girl is wearing pretty or sexy clothes, or even just bright colours. The study found that a female student wearing a revealing outfit is more likely to be sexually harassed by males, than a modestly dressed student, and if harassed, she is partially responsible for her misfortune. These results indicate the persistence of the sexist belief that a woman who wears tight-fitting and revealing clothing is inviting sexual attention. Several studies suggest that both men and some women interpret certain kinds of women's clothing as indicative of a desire for sex. However, the idea of provocative dress is based on false assumptions about the relationship between women's clothing and women's intentions.

**4.2 Participants' view of the meaning of predation in the learning institutions**

The majority of the participants in this investigation have considerable ambiguity in the understanding of sexual harassment. Some of the respondents were not sure of what harassment is. Some of them were afraid to report sexual harassment. This uncertainty is an 'attributional ambiguity' (Major & Crocker, 1993). Accordingly, participants differ in their reactions and responses. Table 2 gives more details on participants' opinions.

Table 2: Female Participants' Responses

Participant Reactions	Do as the lecturer suggests	Talk to someone	Avoid the lecturer	Drop the course	Confront the lecturer	Ignore the lecturer's behaviour	Report to the Head of Department
Percentage	27-33%	71%	62%	4%	0%	24%	3%

A high percentage (97%) of the victims do not report the incident to the superior and choose to ignore the behaviour or do nothing. The survey showed that of the 150 female students who participated in the study, only three reported the incident to the person's superior, and only 71% reported it to someone (a friend, a lecturer, a family member.) The rest of the participants do nothing about it.

Some of the motives given by those who did not try to report the harassment included thinking that other would not believe them; not wanting to look like a trouble maker, and dealing with the situation themselves because it was not serious enough to report. Some victims choose to ignore the harassment or try to avoid the harasser. In Africa, the child is prevented from hearing, seeing, or talking about certain things in their society, such as sex. As a result, the child often knows nothing about sex and its associated problems and cannot talk to people about this (Owoaje and Olusola-Taiwo, 2010). Participants' passive reactions in this study suggest that women often do not explicitly acknowledge sexually harassing behaviour and that even though they perceive it as a negative experience, it is likely to go unreported. However, a few of the female participants were more likely to tell someone about their experience. They talk to a friend or a family member

## 5. Discussion

The study indicated that respondents were unaware of the university resources available to them if they should require advice or support regarding sexual harassment. For grievance procedures to be effective, those in need must be aware of these procedures but also be mindful that they have been victims of sexual harassment. Procedures for dealing with harassment will not come into play unless they make a complaint.

More generally, most responses to sexual harassment tend to be passive rather than active. In the present study, the most preferred answers overall were talking to friends and family, ignoring the instructor, and doing nothing. Respondents showed less preference for the more active forms of behaviour, such as making a formal complaint, writing a letter to the instructor, and speaking to the instructor to resolve the situation. This general tendency towards passivity may be both caused by and contribute to ignorance within an organization, and a lack of institutional actions regarding such incidents. Given that an ambiguous situation was less likely than an unambiguous situation to be acknowledged as sexual harassment and to lead to assertive responding, all those in the department and university environment must receive appropriate training about the various behaviours that constitute sexual predation and about what they can do when such a situation arises.

The outcomes of this study reveal that the vast majority of female respondents did not take any actions.

Participants' responses can be perceived as behavioural intentions and represent the first step in taking action. Human beings are rational and consider the implications of their behaviour in deciding whether or not to react in a particular situation. A person's intention to behave in a certain way has been described as the 'immediate determinant of the action' (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980, p.5.) Although this study assessed only participants' responses to sexual predation, other studies have found a relationship between stated behavioural intention and subsequent behaviour in a variety of contexts. In reality, numerous other variables can affect responses to sexual harassment, such as the previous relationship between the instructor and the student; whether this is an ongoing situation or an isolated incident; the harasser's reaction to the victim's rejection and the possibility of retaliation; and the perceived consequences of taking particular actions (Weiss and Lalonde, 2001). Concerning these stages of responding, while going to the department for advice would seem to be a logical thing to do following such an incident, the study fails to take into account the likely detrimental results of the responses at this stage. The decision to be made at this point might depend on the consequences of the first course of action.

The existence of sexual harassment in academia, and the seriousness of its consequences, interferes with the educational and career-building pursuits of women. Factors associated with globalization, understood as the combination of economic integration, technological diffusion, and greater access to information

have operated through markets, formal institutions (schools), and informal institutions to lift some of the constraints to greater gender equality (World Development Report, 2012). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 focus on quality education and reducing gender inequality, respectively. However, sexual predation continues in African institutions of higher education. Progress toward these SDG requires actions to discourage and eradicate it.

## **5. Conclusion**

The focus of this study is on some female students' responses to sexual predation in the English Language Teaching Industry in Francophone Africa. The research showed that many female students fall prey to some form of sexual harassment by a lecturer during their studies. There are various interlocked factors which work together to cause educator sexual misconduct in the selected English departments. The findings of this study indicate power differentials and gender inequality, the constraint of available financial resources, grades, sanctioning bad behaviour, a lack of motivation and ambition, and possibly revealing female outfits, as causes of sexual predation by male supervisors. The female respondents did not take many actions. Their responses can be perceived as behavioural intentions and represent only the first step in taking action. Participants differed in their reactions and responses. Some of them are afraid to report sexual harassment and choose to ignore the behaviour or do nothing. Some talk to a friend and a family member, some avoid the lecturer and ignore him; others do nothing and drop the class. Still, others do as the instructor suggests.

This result is highly important for language educators and policymakers to carefully inspect how English language learning unfolds in the context under investigation and to make necessary changes to advocate the best English language learning and teaching for higher education learners. Indeed, the question may also need to be asked, given the reticence of several students to learn the language as well as the incidents of male to female sexual harassment and predation – does the English language need to have such a high profile in French-speaking African universities?

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