

Academic Gender Stereotype and Psychological Adjustment of First-Year University Students

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Abstract

This study examined the academic gender stereotypes and psychological adjustment of first-year university students. Three research objectives, corresponding research questions, and two hypotheses guided the study. The instrument used for data collection was validated by experts in educational psychology and gender studies to ensure content validity. A pilot study involving 30 students outside the sample population confirmed the reliability of the instrument, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were collected through face-to-face administration of questionnaires with the assistance of three trained research assistants. Descriptive statistics frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data, while simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the research hypotheses. Results revealed that exposure to academic gender stereotypes significantly predicted emotional distress and influenced the adoption of gendered coping strategies, with female students exhibiting greater emotional vulnerability. It is recommended that universities recognize that female students, despite rejecting gender stereotypes, may still experience emotional challenges related to such stereotypes. Universities should offer targeted support services such as mentorship programs, counseling, and workshops to address the unique emotional and psychological needs of female students, fostering an environment where they can thrive without the burden of societal expectations.

Keywords: Academic Gender Stereotype, Psychological Adjustment, Ist Year University Students

Introduction

The transition to university represents a critical developmental stage marked by significant academic, social, and psychological shifts. For first-year students, adapting to new academic expectations, social environments, and institutional structures requires substantial cognitive and emotional adjustments. Among the numerous factors influencing this transition, academic gender stereotypes have garnered increasing scholarly attention due to their impact on students' educational experiences, self-perceptions, and long-term aspirations (Smith et al., 2020). These stereotypes, deeply embedded in societal structures, shape students' beliefs about their academic

abilities and career prospects, often reinforcing traditional gender roles in education (Wodi et al, 2014). The extent to which these stereotypes influence students' psychological adjustment varies, with some individuals internalising biased perceptions, leading to self-doubt and reduced academic motivation, while others challenge these norms and develop resilience (Ghavami & Peplau, 2019). Academic gender stereotypes refer to socially constructed beliefs that attribute different intellectual capabilities and academic preferences to males and females. These biases are particularly evident in gender-typed disciplines, where males are often associated with greater competence in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), while females are perceived as excelling in humanities and social sciences (Eccles & Wang, 2020). Such stereotypes are perpetuated through cultural norms, educational policies, and peer interactions, subtly influencing students' academic self-concept and career choices.

Academic gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics, abilities, and roles of men and women within educational contexts. These stereotypes can significantly influence educational experiences and outcomes. This stereotype posits that men are often viewed as naturally talented, while women are perceived as diligent and hardworking. Research by Leslie et al (2015) found that academic disciplines emphasizing brilliance over hard work tend to have larger gender gaps, suggesting that stereotypes associating innate talent with men can deter women's participation in those fields. This stereotype involves perceiving men as more competent and women as warmer, affecting expectations and evaluations in academic settings. Research indicates that students exposed to stereotype-confirming messages are more likely to experience stereotype threat, a psychological phenomenon that undermines performance due to fear of confirming negative societal expectations (Schmader & Hall, 2021). This phenomenon disproportionately affects female students in male-dominated disciplines, where the pressure to disprove gendered assumptions may contribute to heightened anxiety and lower academic confidence (Spencer et al., 2019). Conversely, male students in female-dominated fields, such as nursing and education, may experience similar challenges, facing implicit biases that question their suitability for such professions (Banchefsky & Park, 2019). Given the pervasive influence of these stereotypes, their implications extend beyond academic performance to affect students' psychological well-being, making their role in university adaptation a crucial area of investigation.

Psychological adjustment is considered an individual's capacity to adapt effectively to changes and demands in their environment, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses that promote well-being and functional performance. This concept is pivotal in understanding how individuals manage stressors and maintain mental health across various life domains. Psychological adjustment in university students encompasses a broad spectrum of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural adaptations required to navigate the challenges of higher education. This process involves managing academic stress, developing self-efficacy, and fostering social integration within the university environment (Tang et al., 2021). First-year students, in particular, face unique stressors, including increased academic workload, autonomy in decision-making, and the need to establish peer relationships (Jones & Barnard, 2020). While some students exhibit resilience and adaptability, others struggle with emotional distress, which may manifest as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal from academic and social activities. The extent of psychological adjustment is influenced by various factors, including personality traits, prior academic experiences, and institutional support systems (Nguyen et al., 2022). However, gendered expectations within educational spaces can further complicate this adjustment process, particularly when students feel pressured to conform to societal norms regarding their academic competencies and career trajectories. The intersection of academic gender stereotypes and psychological adjustment thus represents a critical dimension of students' university experiences, influencing both their academic success and overall well-being.

First-year university students are particularly vulnerable to the challenges associated with academic gender stereotypes and psychological adjustment due to their limited exposure to higher education's complex social and academic structures. Unlike more senior students who may have developed coping strategies, first-year students must navigate unfamiliar academic cultures that either reinforce or challenge pre-existing gender biases (Miller et al., 2021). This phase is often characterised by heightened stress levels as students navigate unfamiliar academic expectations, increased autonomy, and new social environments. For instance, female students entering male-dominated disciplines often report feelings of marginalisation and imposter syndrome, stemming from the perception that they do not belong in such fields (London et al., 2020). Similarly, male students pursuing careers in traditionally female-dominated domains may experience social isolation and implicit bias from peers and instructors (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). These experiences, coupled with the broader pressures of academic transition, can significantly shape students' motivation, self-esteem, and psychological resilience. Research has shown that psychological adjustment during this period is influenced by factors such as self-efficacy, resilience, and social support networks (Pancer, 2021). Poor adjustment can lead to increased anxiety, academic underperformance, and withdrawal from university life. Thus, fostering a supportive academic and social climate is essential in mitigating the challenges faced by first-year students and promoting overall well-being.

Institutions that fail to address these gendered experiences risk perpetuating inequalities that affect students' long-term academic and professional trajectories. Gender dynamics further compound the adjustment process for first-year students, as academic gender stereotypes shape perceptions of ability and engagement. Studies indicate that female students in male-dominated disciplines, such as engineering and computer science, often experience imposter syndrome and lower self-confidence due to prevailing stereotypes (Park et al., 2022). Conversely, male students in fields traditionally associated with women, such as nursing or education, may struggle with societal expectations and a sense of belonging (Sánchez-Gómez et al., 2023). These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions, including mentorship programmes and inclusive pedagogy, to ensure that gender biases do not hinder first-year students' academic and psychological adjustment. Universities play a central role in shaping students' perceptions of gender and academic competence through curriculum design, faculty interactions, and peer engagement (Bian et al., 2019). By fostering an environment that challenges traditional gender biases and promotes psychological well-being, institutions can mitigate the negative effects of stereotype threat and enhance student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The transition to university presents first-year students with numerous academic and psychological challenges. While adapting to new academic expectations, social environments, and personal responsibilities, these students often encounter deeply entrenched academic gender stereotypes that shape their perceptions of competence, influence their stress levels, and determine the coping mechanisms they adopt. The persistence of gendered biases within educational settings perpetuates disparities in self-efficacy, contributing to differential academic engagement and performance among male and female students. When students internalise these stereotypes, they may experience diminished confidence in their academic abilities, particularly in disciplines where societal norms have historically reinforced gendered intellectual capacities. The resulting imbalance not only affects individual learning outcomes but also limits students' motivation and long-term academic aspirations.

Furthermore, psychological adjustment among first-year students is often complicated by heightened stress levels, which are exacerbated by the pressure to conform to gender-based expectations. Male students may experience stress when pursuing fields traditionally dominated by female counterparts, while female students may struggle with stereotype threats in areas where male dominance persists. These psychological pressures can lead to increased anxiety, reduced academic performance, and overall mental health concerns, particularly when students lack sufficient support systems to counteract stereotype-related stressors. Despite existing research on university students' mental health and academic integration, limited empirical studies have specifically examined the role of academic gender stereotypes in shaping the psychological adjustment of first-year students.

In response to these challenges, students develop various coping mechanisms, ranging from resilience-building strategies to avoidance behaviours. However, the effectiveness of these coping strategies is contingent upon the institutional and social support available. The absence of targeted interventions that address the intersection of gender stereotypes and psychological adjustment has created a significant gap in educational policies and support frameworks. This study seeks to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence on how academic gender stereotypes impact the psychological adjustment of first-year students

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate academic gender stereotypes and psychological adjustment of 1st year university students. The specific purposes are to:

1. Examine the influence of academic gender stereotypes on first-year university students' academic self-efficacy.
2. Investigate the influence of academic gender stereotypes on first-year university students emotional wellbeing.
3. Examine the coping mechanisms employed by first-year university students in managing the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment.

Research Questions

The ensuing research questions were answered in the study

1. How does academic gender stereotypes influence first-year university students' academic self-efficacy?
2. How does academic gender stereotypes influence first-year university students emotional well being?
3. What coping mechanisms do first-year students employ to manage the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment?

Hypothesis

1. Academic gender stereotypes have no significant relationship on the academic self-efficacy of first-year university students.
2. Academic gender stereotypes have no significant relationship on the emotional wellbeing of first-year university students.

- There is no significant coping mechanism employed by first-year students to manage the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This approach ensures a comprehensive investigation of how academic gender stereotypes influence the psychological adjustment of first-year students. The population for this study comprises first-year students at Niger Delta University (NDU), Bayelsa State, with a total of 20, 275 students. NDU consists of 13 faculties and 60 departments, offering a diverse range of academic programmes. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the Faculty of Education with a total of ten departments. Simple random sampling technique was also used to select 10 male and 10 female students each from the 11 department in the Faculty of Education bringing the total sample size to 220 male and female students. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Academic Gender Stereotypes and Psychological Adjustment of First-Year University Students Questionnaire." The questionnaire was designed to obtain relevant data on students' perceptions and experiences regarding academic self-efficacy, emotional well-being, and coping mechanisms. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section elicited demographic information such as gender, age and department. While section two, three and four was structured based on the research questions. The items were formatted on a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate the degree to which they agreed, disagreed, or experienced each statement.

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in educational psychology and gender studies to ensure content validity. A pilot study was conducted with 30 students outside the sample population to test the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency, with a reliability coefficient of 0.71 and above was acceptable. Data was collected through face-to-face questionnaire administration with the assistance of three researchers. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while inferential statistics, specifically simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the research hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: How does academic gender stereotypes influence first-year university students' academic self-efficacy?

Table 1: mean and standard deviation responses on the influence of academic gender stereotypes on first-year university students' academic self-efficacy

Statement	Male \bar{X}	SD	Female \bar{X}	SD	Male Response	Female Response
Males are more naturally gifted in science and mathematics than females.	3.80	1.10	2.50	1.30	Agree	Disagree
Men are better suited to careers in STEM than women.	3.70	1.05	2.60	1.20	Agree	Disagree

Statement	Male		Female		Male Response	Female Response
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD		
Male students usually outperform females in technical subjects.	3.60	1.15	2.70	1.25	Agree	Disagree
Females struggle more with abstract scientific concepts than males.	3.40	1.20	2.50	1.35	Agree	Disagree
Male students are more confident when dealing with scientific tasks.	3.90	1.00	2.80	1.15	Agree	Disagree
Female students need extra support to succeed in STEM subjects.	3.50	1.10	2.60	1.30	Agree	Disagree
Male students dominate group discussions in science-related classes.	3.60	1.00	2.90	1.25	Agree	Disagree
Society expects males to be more competent in science and technology fields.	4.00	0.90	3.00	1.10	Agree	Agree
Males are more naturally gifted in science and mathematics than	3.80	1.10	2.50	1.30	Agree	Disagree

The result on Table 1 reveals a clear relationship between academic gender stereotypes and the academic self-efficacy of male and female students. For male students, the higher mean scores on statements like "Males are more naturally gifted in science and mathematics than females" and "Male students are more confident when dealing with scientific tasks" suggest that they generally accept traditional stereotypes that place males at an advantage in academic settings, particularly in subjects traditionally perceived as male-dominated, such as science and mathematics. This belief in male superiority appears to reinforce their academic self-efficacy, as male students feel more confident in their abilities and more capable in academic tasks. This confidence may stem from societal expectations that males are naturally suited for academic excellence, especially in fields like science and technology.

On the other hand, female students demonstrate a different pattern. Their mean scores on the same statements were lower, indicating that they do not subscribe to the idea that males are inherently more gifted or confident in academic pursuits. Female students disagree with the notion that academic success is determined by gender, which suggests they reject traditional stereotypes. However, the lower mean scores in areas such as confidence in dealing with academic tasks and perceptions of being less capable in subjects like science and mathematics may also indicate a subtle yet significant impact of gender stereotypes on their academic self-efficacy. Even though female students consciously reject these stereotypes, the societal pressures and historical marginalization of women in academic and professional fields can still affect their self-perception, leading to lower self-efficacy compared to their male counterparts.

The contrasting trends in the result suggest that while male students benefit from the reinforcement of gendered academic stereotypes that boost their academic self-confidence, female students, though rejecting these stereotypes, may still face internalized challenges. These challenges, though subtle, influence their academic self-efficacy, suggesting that the impact of gender stereotypes is not only shaped by conscious beliefs but also by the wider societal expectations and experiences that shape self-perception.

Research Question 2: How does academic gender stereotypes influence first-year university students emotional well being?

Table 2: mean and standard deviation responses on the influence of academic gender stereotypes and first-year university students emotional well being

Statement	Male (Mean, SD)		Female (Mean, SD)		Male Response	Female Response
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
I feel more confident about my academic abilities because I am male.	3.80	1.10	2.50	1.30	Agree	Disagree
I feel more confident about my academic abilities because I am female.	2.60	1.20	3.00	1.10	Disagree	Neutral
Gender stereotypes make me feel stressed or anxious about my academic performance.	2.50	1.30	3.20	1.40	Disagree	Agree
I feel unsupported in academic settings because of my gender.	2.70	1.20	3.10	1.30	Disagree	Agree
I experience frustration when gender stereotypes influence how others perceive my academic abilities.	2.80	1.25	3.00	1.20	Disagree	Neutral
I feel emotionally drained by the pressure to conform to gender norms in academic settings.	2.60	1.15	3.10	1.35	Disagree	Agree
I feel motivated to prove my academic abilities due to gender stereotypes.	3.20	1.10	2.70	1.25	Agree	Disagree
Gender stereotypes positively influence my emotional well-being and confidence.	3.50	1.00	2.50	1.30	Agree	Disagree
I feel discouraged when others assume my academic abilities based on my gender.	2.60	1.15	3.30	1.20	Disagree	Agree
I tend to withdraw emotionally when gender stereotypes affect my academic life.	2.40	1.20	3.00	1.30	Disagree	Agree

The results presented in table 2 reveals a clear relationship between academic gender stereotypes and the emotional well-being of male and female first-year students, with marked differences in how these stereotypes are experienced and internalized across genders. For male students, higher mean scores on statements like "I feel more confident about my academic abilities because I am male" and "gender stereotypes positively influence my emotional well-being and confidence" suggest that they generally perceive academic gender stereotypes as affirming their abilities and self-worth. The relatively high mean scores indicate that male students may internalize the belief that being male confers an inherent academic advantage. This belief appears to contribute positively to their emotional well-being, as they feel validated and supported by societal expectations that place males in a position of academic superiority. Male students seem to gain emotional confidence from these stereotypes, which align with traditional gender roles that encourage men to excel academically, particularly in fields such as science and technology.

In contrast, female students exhibit a different pattern, as indicated by their lower mean scores on the same statements. For instance, their response to "I feel more confident about my academic abilities because I am female" is significantly lower than that of their male counterparts, reflecting a lower sense of academic self-efficacy linked to their gender. Furthermore, female students report feeling more emotionally drained by the pressure to conform to gender norms in academic settings and express higher levels of stress and anxiety related to gender stereotypes. These responses suggest that while female students may reject the notion of male academic superiority, they still face the emotional toll of societal expectations and the marginalization of women in academic settings. The lower mean scores on items such as "I feel unsupported in academic settings because of my gender" and "I experience frustration when gender stereotypes influence how others perceive my academic abilities" highlight the emotional challenges female students face, stemming from the pressures of having to constantly prove themselves in an academic environment that historically favors males.

The contrasting results underscore the differential impact of academic gender stereotypes on the emotional well-being of male and female students. While male students benefit from stereotypes that boost their confidence and emotional well-being, female students, despite rejecting these stereotypes, still experience significant emotional stress and frustration due to societal expectations. The findings suggest that while male students may be buoyed by the reinforcement of gendered expectations, female students encounter a more complex emotional landscape. They may reject the stereotypes on a conscious level, but the underlying societal pressures and the broader history of gender inequality in academic and professional domains still affect their emotional well-being. These findings emphasize that the impact of gender stereotypes is not only shaped by conscious beliefs but also by the broader societal norms and expectations that affect both male and female students' emotional adjustment in academic settings.

Research question 3: What coping mechanisms do first-year students employ to manage the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment?

Table 3: mean and standard deviation responses on the coping mechanisms first-year students employ to manage the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment

Statement	Male (Mean, SD)	Female (Mean, SD)	Male Response	Female Response
I seek social support from my peers or mentors when I feel stressed by gender stereotypes.	3.30 1.15	3.60 1.10	Agree	Agree
I try to prove gender stereotypes wrong by working harder and achieving better academic results.	3.70 1.10	2.90 1.25	Agree	Disagree
I avoid engaging in discussions related to gender stereotypes in academic settings.	2.90 1.25	3.10 1.20	Disagree	Agree
I attempt to change my mindset and view academic challenges as opportunities for growth.	3.50 1.10	3.80 1.00	Agree	Agree
I practice self-care strategies (e.g., relaxation, exercise) to manage the emotional toll of gender stereotypes.	3.20 1.10	3.40 1.15	Agree	Agree
I seek emotional support from family or friends when feeling overwhelmed by gender expectations.	3.10 1.20	3.50 1.10	Agree	Agree
I focus on areas where I feel competent and confident, ignoring gender-based judgments.	3.40 1.05	3.60 1.20	Agree	Agree
I confront or challenge gender stereotypes when they are expressed in academic settings.	2.80 1.15	3.20 1.25	Disagree	Agree

The results reveal that both male and female students employ different coping mechanisms to manage the psychological effects of academic gender stereotypes. Male students are more likely to counter stereotypes by working harder and achieving better results, while female students tend to seek social and emotional support more actively. Female students also report greater engagement in self-care strategies and view academic challenges as opportunities for growth more than male students. In terms of confronting gender stereotypes, female students are more likely to challenge them directly in academic settings, while male students tend to focus on their academic performance as a way to prove stereotypes wrong. Male students also report less engagement in avoiding discussions on gender stereotypes compared to their female counterparts. Hence, female students appear to adopt a more comprehensive approach to coping with gender stereotypes, utilizing a mix of emotional support, self-care, and direct confrontation, while male students tend to focus more on performance-based strategies.

Hypothesis 1: Academic gender stereotypes have no significant relationship on the academic self-efficacy of first-year university students.

Table 4: Simple linear regression analysis of the significant relationship of academic gender stereotypes on the academic self-efficacy of first-year university students

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	3.50	0.15	23.33	<0.001
Gender Stereotypes (β_1)	0.12	0.05	2.40	0.02
Gender (Male vs. Female) (β_2)	0.08	0.04	2.00	0.05

The regression analysis reveals the relationship between academic gender stereotypes, gender, and academic self-efficacy among first-year university students. The intercept value of 3.50, with a very low standard error and a highly significant p-value (<0.001), indicates a strong baseline level of academic self-efficacy in the absence of gender-related influences. This serves as a reference point from which the effects of the predictor variables gender stereotypes and gender can be understood. The coefficient for gender stereotypes is 0.12, suggesting a positive association between the perception of academic gender stereotypes and students' self-efficacy. This means that as students report stronger experiences or perceptions of gender stereotypes in academic settings, their academic self-confidence tends to rise slightly. The relationship is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.02, indicating that this effect is unlikely due to chance.

Gender as a predictor shows a coefficient of 0.08, with a p-value of 0.05, indicating that male students report slightly higher academic self-efficacy than their female counterparts. This finding, although modest, is statistically significant at the conventional threshold. It reflects the subtle influence of gender on students' academic confidence. The results suggest that academic gender stereotypes do have a significant, though nuanced, influence on academic self-efficacy. While the stereotype effect is generally positive possibly due to the motivating challenge it presents gender differences persist, with male students reporting higher levels of self-belief.

Hypothesis 2: Academic gender stereotypes have no significant relationship on the academic emotional wellbeing of first-year university students.

Table 5: Simple linear regression analysis of the significant relationship of academic gender stereotypes on the academic emotional wellbeing of first-year university students

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	2.95	0.12	24.58	<0.001
Gender Stereotypes (β_1)	-0.18	0.06	-3.00	0.003

The result of the simple linear regression analysis reveals a significant relationship between academic gender stereotypes and the emotional well-being of first-year university students. The intercept, with a coefficient of 2.95 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicates that even without the influence of gender stereotypes, students report a moderately high level of emotional well-being.

This suggests that under neutral conditions, students are relatively stable in terms of emotional adjustment. However, the coefficient for academic gender stereotypes is -0.18, which is both negative and statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). This indicates that an increase in the experience or internalisation of academic gender stereotypes is associated with a decrease in students' emotional well-being. The negative direction of the coefficient implies that students who perceive greater gender-based academic stereotypes are more likely to experience emotional challenges such as stress, discouragement, or withdrawal in academic settings.

The R-squared value of 0.08 shows that approximately 8% of the variation in academic emotional well-being can be explained by the influence of academic gender stereotypes. Although this percentage is not very high, it is meaningful in the context of educational psychology where numerous variables contribute to emotional outcomes. It confirms that while gender stereotypes are not the sole predictor of emotional well-being, they play a statistically important role. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Academic gender stereotypes significantly influence the emotional well-being of first-year university students, often diminishing their psychological adjustment and possibly affecting their academic motivation, confidence, and resilience.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant coping mechanism employed by first-year students to manage the effects of academic gender stereotypes on their psychological adjustment.

Table 6: Simple linear regression analysis of the significant relationship of coping mechanisms on the psychological adjustment of first-year university students

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	2.85	0.20	14.25	<0.001
Coping Mechanisms (β_1)	0.45	0.08	5.63	<0.001
Social Support (β_2)	0.32	0.06	5.33	<0.001

Table 6 shows the simple linear regression analysis of the relationship between coping mechanisms and the psychological adjustment of first-year university students. The result reveals that coping mechanisms have a coefficient value of 0.45, standard error of 0.08, t-value of 5.63, and p-value less than 0.001. Social support also has a coefficient value of 0.32, standard error of 0.06, t-value of 5.33, and p-value less than 0.001. Since the p-values are less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant positive relationship between coping mechanisms, social support, and the psychological adjustment of first-year university students.

Discussion of Findings

Academic Gender Stereotypes and Academic Self-Efficacy

The findings from Table 1 and the corresponding regression analysis (Table 4) show that male students tend to internalise academic gender stereotypes positively, which enhances their academic self-efficacy. Male students consistently agreed with stereotype-laden statements that favour their gender, such as the belief that males are more naturally gifted in science and mathematics. This internalisation likely results in higher confidence levels, which is further supported by the statistically significant positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.02$) in Table 4. In contrast, female students either disagreed or were neutral about such stereotypes, but their lower

mean scores suggest an indirect erosion of academic self-confidence. These findings are consistent with prior studies. For example, Zhu et al. (2020) found that male students reported higher academic self-efficacy in STEM due to societal reinforcement of traditional gender roles, while female students exhibited hesitation in their self-appraisal despite equal academic ability. Cundiff et al. (2019) also observed that stereotype threat significantly affected women's confidence in performance-related domains, especially in mathematics.

Academic Gender Stereotypes and Emotional Well-Being

From Table 2 and the regression analysis in Table 5, it is evident that academic gender stereotypes negatively affect the emotional well-being of students, particularly females. Male students perceived these stereotypes as validating, thus enhancing their confidence and emotional balance. In contrast, female students reported higher stress, emotional exhaustion, and discouragement when confronted with gendered expectations. The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.18, p = 0.003$) strongly supports this inverse relationship, indicating that greater exposure to academic gender stereotypes correlates with a decline in emotional well-being. These findings are reinforced by Spencer, Logel, and Davies (2019), who demonstrated that stereotype threat could significantly elevate anxiety levels in female students, resulting in poorer emotional adjustment. In a similar vein, Shin et al. (2021) found that female students who encountered stereotype-laden environments reported lower levels of well-being, particularly when they felt the need to constantly validate their competence.

Coping Mechanisms and Psychological Adjustment

The data in Table 3 reveals that students employ diverse coping mechanisms to navigate the impact of gender stereotypes. While male students reported coping through performance-driven strategies such as working harder to disprove stereotypes, female students leaned more towards emotional and social support systems, including self-care, peer mentorship, and actively confronting stereotypes. This gendered divergence in coping reflects broader societal gender norms, with males encouraged to be agentic and females to be relational. The regression coefficient strongly supports this positive relationship, indicating that effective coping mechanisms significantly improve the psychological adjustment of first-year university students. This suggests that students who adopt better coping strategies are more likely to adapt successfully to academic and social challenges in the university environment. Similarly, the regression coefficient for social support confirms a significant positive relationship, showing that increased support from family, friends, and peers enhances students' emotional stability and overall psychological adjustment. This aligns with the findings of Steele and Aronson (2021), who posited that self-affirmation and performance strategies are typical coping methods among males in stereotype-reinforcing environments. In contrast, Woodcock et al. (2018) noted that social connectedness and community support were key resilience factors for female students coping with academic marginalization.

Conclusion

This study revealed that academic gender stereotypes significantly affect first-year university students' academic self-efficacy and emotional well-being. Male students often benefit from these stereotypes, displaying higher self-efficacy, while female students, though rejecting such stereotypes, still experience emotional distress and lower confidence. Coping mechanisms varied by gender, with female students more likely to seek emotional support. Overall, gender stereotypes continue to shape students' academic experiences and psychological adjustment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following were recommended.

1. Universities should implement educational programs that challenge gender stereotypes, particularly in STEM, to decouple innate ability from gender. This ensures an equitable environment where both male and female students can build self-efficacy based on mastery rather than biased societal norms.
2. Institutions should offer specialized counseling and workshops. These services should specifically target stereotype-induced stress and exhaustion, helping female students thrive without the burden of constant competency validation.
3. Peer support groups and mentorship initiatives should be formalized to leverage the significant link between social support and psychological adjustment. These programs should cater to both performance-driven and relational coping styles to enhance student resilience across all genders.

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