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Attitudes to Nigerian Englishes in higher education

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Abstract

Although there is a bourgeoning of studies on attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes, there is limited research on the effects of participants' discipline (STEM and non-STEM) and the type of secondary school (private and government) they attended in evaluating Nigerian Englishes. Examining these new variables is particularly critical in understanding how educational background impacts language attitudes, given the disparities in educational resources between government and private schools. Thus, this study uses a verbal-guise experiment to examine the attitudes of 406 Nigerian students towards three Nigerian Englishes (Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English). The MANOVA results show that the STEM participants rated the varieties more favourably than the non-STEM participants. The results also indicate that participants who attended government secondary schools evaluated the varieties more favourably than those who attended private secondary schools. This study contributes to the literature on language attitudes and community of practice.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the last six decades, research on attitudes towards languages and varieties has attracted ample attention in language attitude research (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). These studies, aimed to examine different evaluative reactions towards languages, have focused on the effects of social variables such as gender (Hansen Edwards, 2019; Ladegaard, 2000), race (Kutlu et al., 2022), occupation (Chien, 2018), religion (Yilmaz, 2020), regional provenance (Ugwuanyi &

Oyebola, 2022), age (McKenzie & McNeill, 2022) and social class (Giles & Sassoon, 1983) on language attitudes. This scholarship generally illustrates that language attitudes are informed by social variables. In other words, individuals do not simply evaluate accents or varieties; they do so based on their own attributes and the perceived social attributes of the speakers. Despite this burgeoning research, there is a paucity of studies on the effects of educational variables, such as discipline and type of secondary school education, in evaluating language varieties. To fill this gap, this article examines the effects of these educational variables on the evaluation of three Nigerian Englishes (Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English) from the community of practice theoretical perspective. These variables are important in the Nigerian sociolinguistic context, especially where there is a huge difference between government and private schools in their emphasis on English learning and access to educational resources (Baum et al., 2018). Exploring the effect of these variables on evaluating Nigerian Englishes is significant in highlighting the various factors that contribute to individuals' evaluations of varieties and extends folk linguistic studies in Nigeria. Taking these variables into account can illuminate the complex relationship between educational factors and language attitudes and help identify potential inequalities in language learning opportunities (Ladegaard, 2020). By understanding these inequalities, efforts can be made to promote equal access to language education for all individuals (Cushing, 2022).

Existing language attitude research in the Nigerian context has explored attitudes towards Nigerian English and other varieties of English, such as Received Pronunciation, Standardised American, Canadian, Ghanaian, Jamaican, Indian, Scottish and Ivorian Englishes (Olatoye, 2022; Ugwuanyi & Oyebola, 2022; Williams, 1983), and Nigerian Pidgin English (Oyebola & Ugwuanyi, 2023). These studies are consistent with their findings that Received Pronunciation and Standardised American English receive more favourable ratings on status than Nigerian English. However, Nigerian English tends to be evaluated more favourably on solidarity than exonormative varieties. While participants showed positive attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English, they did not support it to function as Nigeria's official language. Examining attitudes towards Hausa English (HE), Igbo English (IE) and Yoruba English (YE), Aboh (2023b) found that HE was consistently rated as the least attractive on status, solidarity and quality of language while YE received the most positive ratings on status and quality of language. Studies that incorporate the effects of social variables on language evaluation have focused on gender and regional provenance. Gender has been found to have no significant effect on language evaluation (Oyebola, 2020; Ugwuanyi & Oyebola, 2022). While Oyebola (2020) found significant effects of regional provenance on language evaluations, Ugwuanyi & Oyebola (2022) did not. This discrepancy can be attributed to the different contexts in which the two studies were conducted. Whereas the former was conducted among Nigerian students in Nigeria, the participants in the latter were Nigerian expatriates in the United Kingdom and Germany. The present study departs from existing scholarship in its focus on the effects of discipline and type of secondary school education on the evaluation of endonormative Nigerian Englishes: HE, IE and YE.

Nigeria is a multicultural and multilingual country, with 520 living languages spoken across over 250 ethnic groups (Eberhard et al., 2023). English is the official language given Nigeria's colonial history with Britain. The range and depth of the power of English in Nigeria cut across educational, official, interpersonal communication, mass media and religious domains (Aboh, 2022; Jowitt, 2019). English serves as many Nigerians' second language. Thus, there is evidence of L1 interference in English usage. This interference has given rise to many nativised Englishes divided along ethnic and educational lines. Given that Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the major ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria, their varieties of English have received ample description and attention in the literature. From a phonological perspective, HE is characterised by the realisations of [p] as [f] as in [fiful] for 'people', and [v] as [b] as in [berɪɔs] for 'various'. Several HE speakers also realise *-ure* ending such as 'failure' [feɪljə] as [jua] as in [felua]. The features that characterise IE include the dentalisation of [t] in intervocalic position as in [an̪e̪na] 'antenna' and the realisation of [nj] as [ɲ] as in [ɲu] for 'new'. YE is mainly characterised by [h] deletion and insertion as in [hɪa] for 'ear' and [ɪa] for 'hear' as well as the use of [a] for [ɜː] as in [tam] 'term' (see Jowitt, 2019, for an extensive description of these ethnic-based linguistic features). Given this background, the present study examines the effects of participants' discipline (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and non-STEM) and type of secondary school education (private and government) on the evaluation of HE, IE and YE accents. Before detailing the methods and presenting the results and discussion, I review the literature on the link between education and English use and the theoretical foundation of this study.

2 | EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE

To a great extent, an individual's level of education may predict his/her competence and fluency in a language, especially in a second or foreign language. Aboh (2023a) found significant relationships between good educational background, verbal fluency and de-ethnicised speech. This finding indicates that a good educational background improves an individual's fluency and results in defocusing away from ethnic-sounding speech to ethnically neutral speech. Given the importance of education in language use, the educational parameter of English usage categorised into basilect, mesolect and acrolect has been proposed (Bickerton, 1975). Some scholars (Bamgbose, 1982; Ugorji, 2010) who have applied this lectal categorisation in Nigerian English equate the basilect with Nigerian Pidgin, a variety of English considered initially to be spoken by individuals with little education and used in informal contexts (Faraclas, 2021; Ndiribe & Aboh, 2022). Recently, educated Nigerians also speak Pidgin English to signal solidarity and for instrumental functions, such as campaigning for elections or marketing a product (Aboh, 2022). Mesolect is a variety characterised by high instances of L1 interference and is spoken by individuals with primary and secondary education (Bamgbose, 1982). Acrolect is spoken by individuals who have attained tertiary education and is used in formal contexts. However, Jowitt (2019) criticises this tripartite lectal approach to characterising Nigerian English because of the challenge of categorically differentiating the features of the three lectal categories, which he considers to be a continuum rather than discrete. Thus, he proposes a two-level classification: acrolectal/more educated and nonacrolectal/less educated (a fusion of the basilectal and mesolectal varieties). Acrolectal or educated Nigerian English variety is close to the Standardised British English (SBE) and is regarded as the Standardised Nigerian English used in education, government or professional settings.

Apart from the impact of level of education on English usage, another factor that may predict proficiency in English usage is the type of education attended by an individual. In the Nigerian educational system, there is a distinction between private and government institutions at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Studies have reported inadequate financial support to government schools by the Nigerian government (Salau et al., 2020). In other words, Nigerian government schools are often characterised by ill-equipped laboratories, libraries and dilapidated buildings, thus negatively impacting the quality of teaching and learning. Private schools tend to provide quality education owing to competition among them. Additionally, private schools, especially in cities such as Abuja and Lagos, emphasise English language proficiency and provide accent reduction classes to enable students to speak in an SBE accent (Orjinmo, 2023). Given this disparity between government and private schools, we may expect to observe differences between students educated in private schools and those educated in government schools regarding English usage and their attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes.

Mesthrie (2017) demonstrated the impact of the type of education (model-C and non-model-C) on linguistic behaviour in his sociophonetic study of schwa in the South African context. Model-C schools are considered more prestigious because they were formerly reserved for Whites, and the teachers speak White South African English (WSAE). Non-model-C schools were reserved for Blacks and predominantly had teachers who spoke Black South African English. Mesthrie (2017) found that Blacks who enrolled in model-C schools take up the features of WSAE schwa compared to Blacks who attended non-model-C schools. Thus, the former had access to an exemplar model (Pierrehumbert, 2006) or a settler (STL) target (Schneider, 2007), whereas the latter did not. The exemplar model states that individuals possess linguistic features similar to those with which they interact consistently, which serve as remembered examples. This imitation is also observed during the language acquisition process and can change as human development progresses. As Pierrehumbert (2006, p. 517) argues, 'Preschool children match the dialectal features of their primary caregivers, and modify these features when they start school and acquire a peer group of schoolmates'. Similar to Mesthrie's (2017) study, Stell (2022) explored de-ethnicisation in Namibian English and found that Ovambo and Baster speakers who attended government schools had more ethnic-sounding speech than those who attended private schools.

Another educational factor that may predict language attitudes and English language proficiency is participants' discipline. A distinction is often made between STEM and non-STEM in tertiary institutions. Although both disciplines use English as a medium of instruction, non-STEM disciplines, especially the language sciences, emphasise communication and English proficiency. However, given that most of the non-STEM participants in this study are from language-related courses and have been trained that no variety or accent is superior to the other, we might expect non-STEM participants to be more generous in their evaluation of varieties. Trudgill & Giles (1978) argue that sociolinguists do not believe an inherently 'beautiful' or 'correct' linguistic form exists. The concept of 'beautiful' or 'ugly' linguistic forms is favoured by non-linguists, including many teachers (Ladegaard, 1998). However, it is also possible that since language students have been trained in grammar and phonetics, their linguistic knowledge may result in negative evaluations of perceived non-standardised accents. From a folk linguistic perspective, Preston (1996) argues that non-linguists have limited awareness of the phonological details of an accent; hence, they may not be critical in its evaluation.

3 | THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

This study is informed by the framework of community of practice in that government and public secondary schools as well as STEM and non-STEM are considered different communities of practices given their unique shared repertoire and the mutual engagement of respective participants. Community of practice was proposed within the context of learning and practices in professional settings, such as claims processing in an insurance company (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) argues that the communities of practices (such as at home, school, and work) individuals belong to influence their behaviour and perceptions. Community of practice is conceptualised as 'an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2011, p. 578). These ways of doing things 'as grounded in and shared by a community' are what is meant by the practice of a community (Eckert & Wenger, 2005).

Wenger (1998) identifies participation and reification as fundamental to the negotiation of meaning in a community of practice. As individuals participate in a community, their experiences are shaped, and they can also contribute to shaping aspects of their community's practices, which might lead to continuous improvement and innovation. Reification is the vivid representation or reflection of the practices of a community, which can be in the form of stories, tools, artefacts and monuments, aimed at transforming practices into a congealed form. New members can use these representations to learn about the community. As Wenger (1998, p. 58) clarifies, 'Whereas in participation we recognize ourselves in each other, in reification we project ourselves onto the world, and not having to recognize ourselves in those projections, we attribute to our meanings an independent existence'.

Wenger (1998) spells out mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire as the characteristics of a community. First, members of a community of practice need to do things together and strive to maintain the practices of their community. However, Wenger (1998) argues that the mutual engagement of a community of practice does not entail homogeneity given that alliance and competition, agreement and disagreement owing to different perspectives can characterise a community of practice. Instead, what is important is that these differences or heterogeneities are communally negotiated. The second characteristic of a community of practice is that members have a joint enterprise that allows them to pursue a common purpose. Finally, a community of practice should have a shared repertoire, which includes styles, historical events, stories and artefacts. Meyerhoff & Strycharz (2013) note that these repertoires serve as the cumulative evidence of internal negotiations.

Given that participating in a community of practice shapes members' experiences and behaviour, the community of practice framework was introduced to sociolinguistics to study linguistic variation and change (Eckert, 2000; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2011). By adopting community of practice, sociolinguists seek to investigate the social meanings of linguistic variables, their interactional goals and the construction of identity, and to show how linguistic practices

reflect heterogeneity within a community (Dodsworth, 2014). A classic example of the application of a community of practice framework to sociolinguistics is Eckert's (2000) analysis of the Northern Cities Chain Shift (NCCS), a set of vowels changing the urban Great Lakes of the northern United States. Using an ethnographic approach, Eckert collected linguistic data from two small groups of students in a suburban high school in Detroit categorised as the jocks (oriented to middle-class values and preparing for college) and the burnouts who oriented to work after high school rather than go to college. A quantitative analysis of the vowels constituting the NCCS showed that the newest changes were led by the burnouts. Rather than exhibiting a major burnout lead, the older NCCS elements—those that had spread sufficiently to shed some of their stigma and urban association—were predominantly led by females, including both jocks and burnouts. Eckert concluded that the more recent components of the NCCS are parts of the common symbolic repertoire that burnouts use to create their own identities as well as those of their groups.

Similarly, Bucholtz (1999) applied the community of practice framework to the context of language and gender using a group of 'nerd' girls in a US high school who reject both the jock and burnout identities and all forms of being 'cool'. Rejecting being 'cool' does not position nerds as 'socially isolated misfits, but competent members of a distinctive and oppositionally defined community of practice' (Bucholtz, 1999, p. 211). Bucholtz found that nerds used negative and positive identity practices at phonological, syntactic, lexical and discursive levels to construct their identity as a community of practice. Negative identity practices reflect what they are not, while positive identity practices reflect what they are, which are employed to emphasise the intragroup aspects of their social identity. Instances of negative identity practices included resistance to vowel reduction and consonant-cluster simplification, and avoidance of non-standardised syntactic forms and slang expressions. Positive identity practices included the use of hypercorrect phonological forms and formal registers, adherence to superstandardised syntactic forms, and discussion of 'unfeminine' topics. These practices reify the nerds' characteristics as a community of practice.

While the community of practice framework has been applied to studying sociolinguistic variation and gender-based research, its application to how participating in a community of practice shapes attitudes towards languages or varieties appears to be relatively unexplored. If linguistic variation can be a function of participating in a community of practice, then we might also expect this participation to inform language attitudes, given that members mutually engage with each other and have a shared repertoire. In this study, I argue that at the macro level, fields of study and type of secondary school education are communities of practice. On the one hand, in his legitimation code theory, Maton (2014) distinguishes the practices of STEM and non-STEM based on the knowledge-knower structures. He argues that STEM disciplines operate on a knowledge code basis which is reified by their adoption of methodological rigour and normative paradigm to legitimate knowledge. However, non-STEM disciplines mainly adopt the interpretive paradigm and depend on researchers' authority and expertise to legitimate knowledge (see also Hu, 2018). These practices are learned by the new members of these disciplines through mutual engagement. More so, the emphasis of non-STEM disciplines, especially language and communication sciences, on linguistic and communicative competence more than STEM disciplines is another shared repertoire that delineates these communities of practice.

On the other hand, the mutual engagement and repertoire of students who attended government secondary schools in Nigeria make them have a unique shared repertoire different from those who attended private secondary schools owing to differences in funding and availability of educational resources (Baum et al., 2018). These differences are reified by perceived *aje kpako* 'local' and *aje butter* 'urban/standardised' practices reflected in the songs and English proficiency of students of government and private schools, which are often used as a tool for comedy in Nigeria. As new students are enrolled in these schools and mutually engage with their peers, they internalise the practices of their community that construct their identities as either government or private school students. As Wenger (1998, p. 6) remarks, 'Students go to school and, as they come together to deal in their own fashion […], communities of practice sprout everywhere—in the classroom as well as on the playground, officially or in the cracks'. By utilising the community of practice framework in this study, I seek to investigate how attitudes of STEM versus non-STEM and private versus government school participants reflect their communities of practice and serve as a reification of their mutual engagement and joint enterprise. Gender was not included as predictors because exploratory analysis indicated no

significant effect on the evaluation of Nigerian Englishes. Age was also not included as a variable due to the relatively homogeneous age range of the participants. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do participants in STEM and non-STEM disciplines differ in their evaluation of HE, IE and YE accents?
2. Do participants who attended private and government secondary schools differ in their evaluation of HE, IE and YE accents?
3. How do attitudes of STEM versus non-STEM and private versus government school participants reflect their communities of practice?

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Participants

The participants for this study were 406 undergraduate students from three universities in the Southeastern, Southwestern and North Central geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Students from North Central were chosen because of the inability to access students from core Hausa ethnolinguistic communities owing to the strike action of university lecturers at the time of data collection. However, given the identity of North Central and North East/West as Northerners, it is assumed they share similar attitudes and social identity (Aboh, 2023a; Ali, 2021). These zones were chosen because they are where the evaluated varieties are predominantly spoken; hence, participants are conversant with the Nigerian Englishes under study.

Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 32 years, with a mean score of 20.4. A total of 52.7% ($n = 214$) reported attending private secondary schools, whereas 47.3% ($n = 192$) attended public or government secondary schools. Of the participants, 72.2% ($n = 293$) were non-STEM students, while the others ($n = 113$, 27.8%) were STEM students. The majority of the non-STEM students were from the departments of English and Literary Studies, English Education and Law, whereas STEM students were mainly from Computer Science, Mathematics and Industrial Chemistry.

Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique, which involves existing participants aiding to identify other potential participants. Additionally, given that the study involved human subjects, ethical approval was obtained. Participants were given consent forms to complete, after which they were given an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, the usefulness and duration of their participation, and a statement assuring the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

4.2 | Instrument

The verbal-guise experiment questionnaire, a widely employed instrument in language attitude research (Kircher & Zipp, 2022), was used to measure participants' attitudes towards HE, IE and YE. The verbal-guise experiment involved playing voices to participants and asking them to evaluate the voices on personality traits. In this study, two speakers (a male and a female) each from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba ethnolinguistic groups were selected. Speakers were selected based on their educational qualifications. All the speakers had at least a Bachelor's degree given that Nigerians with a university degree are often regarded as acrolectal speakers of English (Jowitt, 2019). The mean age of the speakers was 29.5 years. They were given a text that focused on explaining research to read as naturally as possible. Read speech compared to spontaneous speech is preferred in language attitude research because it allows for consistent semantic and lexical content and duration across the guises (Dragojevic & Goatley-Soan, 2022). Each speaker was recorded multiple times, given that speakers were found to read more naturally in later recordings than in earlier ones. Multiple recordings also provided options for selecting recordings that were similar in speech rate and quality (Loureiro-Rodríguez & Acar, 2022). The mean recording time for the six speakers was 37 seconds.

Based on the text read by the speakers, the aggregated phonological features they possessed based on the Nigerian English accent they represented were as follows: The HE speakers' voices were characterised by the substitution of [f] with [p] as in 'afraid' [æpred] and the realisation of [ð] as [z] as in 'other' [ɔza]. The IE speakers dentalised [t] in 'total' [to̪t̪al] and substituted [nj] with [ɲ] as in 'new' [ɲu]. [h] dropping and insertion as in 'hallmarks' [ɔlmaks] and 'also' [hɔlso], as well as the realisation of [ʃ] as [ʒ] in 'issue' [iʒu] characterised the YE speakers. Before presenting the voices to the main participants, they were piloted with ten undergraduate students who confirmed that the voices were authentic representations of the speakers' Nigerian Englishes and similar in voice quality.

To avoid order effects in evaluations (Aboh, 2023b) and following Ladegaard & Sachdev (2006), the voices were randomly presented to the participants who rated them on three dimensions: five status items (education, self-confidence, leadership, wealth and intelligence), four solidarity items (friendliness, sincerity, sense of humour and handsome/beautiful) and four quality of language items (model of pronunciation, correctness, processing fluency and aesthetic quality). The ratings were performed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). To generate the status scale (score range: 1–5), solidarity scale (score range: 1–5) and quality of language scale (score range: 1–5), respectively, the five status items, four solidarity items and four quality of language items were averaged for each speaker. The reliability analysis results of the three scales indicated that Cronbach alpha exceeded .70, the acceptable cut-off score in the literature (Cohen et al., 2018). A confirmatory factor analysis of the scales met the .95 and .06 comparative fit index and root mean square error of approximation cut-offs for an excellent fitting model, indicating that the scales are a good model for measuring attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes in this study.

4.3 | Procedure

Data were collected in the summer of 2022. Before participating in the online VGE, the participants were informed of the study and presented with a consent form. Following their consent, they listened to the speakers and rated them on the status, solidarity and quality of language dimensions. Upon rating all speakers, the participants completed the second section of the questionnaire that elicited their demographic details, such as sex, age, ethnicity, academic discipline and type of secondary school attended. This section also asked them to provide linguistic-related information, such as their indigenous and first language. It took participants an average of 30 minutes to complete the VGE and the demographic information.

4.4 | Method of analysis

One-way between-groups multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to examine the effects of discipline and type of secondary school education on the attitude scores of HE, IE and YE accents. MANOVA is the appropriate test when the independent variable is more than one (Pallant, 2020). The data met the assumptions of MANOVA, such as normality, large sample size, independent groups and no outliers. A sample size of 406 was considered sufficiently large and fairly robust to meet normality assumptions (Field, 2018). There were no outliers in the dependent variables, as indicated by the boxplot and the Mahalanobis distance. There was no multicollinearity across the groups of dependent variables, as evidenced by the results of Pearson's correlation, which showed a moderate correlation (within .3 to .7) among the dependent variables considered the acceptable range for passing the no multicollinearity requirement (Rencher & Christensen, 2012). MANOVA also requires a linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables (Cohen et al., 2018). Visualisations of the variables in scatterplots showed linear relationships.

The Box's *M* statistic was used to test the assumption of variance–covariance among the dependent variables across all levels of the factors (Green & Salkind, 2014). Given that the Box's *M* test was less than .001 in some of the MANOVA tests, Pillai's Trace multivariate statistic was used instead of Wilk's Lambda because it is more robust and

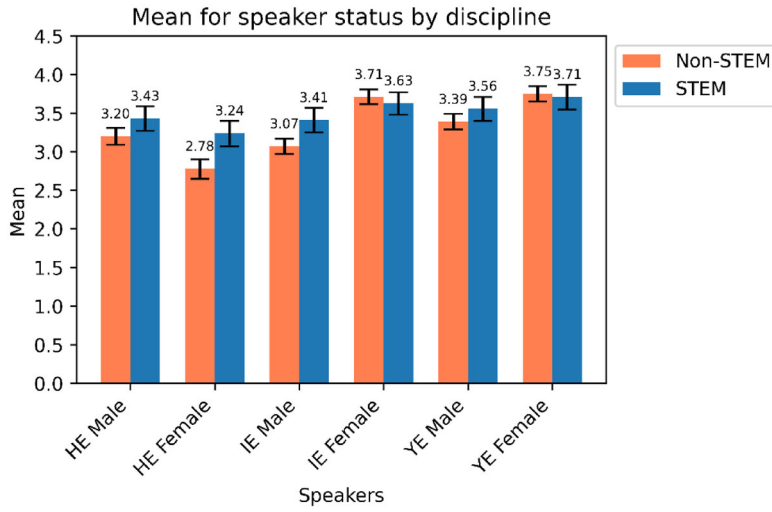

FIGURE 1 Mean evaluations for speaker status by discipline. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

suitable when there is unequal N and violation of the assumption of the variance–covariance among dependent variables (Field, 2018; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Given the number of dependent variables (that is 18) and the necessity to control Type I error (rejecting a null hypothesis when it is true), the alpha was adjusted using the Bonferroni correction, which involved dividing the nominal alpha .05 by the number of statistical tests to obtain the adjusted alpha. Thus, the rationale for setting the alpha at .003. The results of the MANOVA shed more light on the effects of discipline and type of secondary school education on attitudes towards HE, IE and YE. Only the main effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables were reported because the interaction effects were nonsignificant.

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | The main effects of discipline on speaker evaluation

This section presents the results of the main effects of participants' discipline on the ratings of the six speakers. Discipline as the independent variable had two levels: STEM (n = 293, 72.2%) and non-STEM (n = 113, 27.8%). The dependent variables were the rating scores of the six speakers.

5.1.1 | Discipline and speaker status

A one-way between-group MANOVA was performed to investigate the effect of discipline on the participants' evaluation of speaker status. The status ratings of all six speakers were the dependent variables, whereas discipline was the independent variable. Figure 1 summarises the mean scores of the participants' ratings of the speakers on the status dimension.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices (Box's M < .001); thus, Pillai's Trace was reported because it is more robust when the homogeneity of variance–covariance test is violated. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance exceeded .05 for all speakers, which shows that the assumption of equality of variance was not violated. The results of the MANOVA test showed a significant main effect of discipline

TABLE 1 Test of between-subject effects for speaker status by discipline.

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	Sig.	η^2_p
Discipline	HE male	4.328	1	4.328	5.20	.023	.013
	HE female	17.201	1	17.201	16.956	**<.001**	.040
	IE male	9.309	1	9.309	12.332	**<.001**	.030
	IE female	0.433	1	0.433	0.639	.425	.002
	YE male	2.454	1	2.454	3.326	.069	.008
	YE female	0.111	1	0.111	0.148	.701	<.001

Note: The bold values in all the tables signify the dependent variables that reached statistical significance.

on the evaluation of speaker status: F (6, 399) = 3.630, $p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .069; $\eta^2 p = .069$ (a medium effect). This indicates that significant differences existed in the evaluations of any of the six speakers between the non-STEM and STEM participants. Owing to the possibility of an increased Type 1 error when multiple tests are conducted, a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .003 was applied. The test of between-subject effects demonstrated that two (IE male and HE female) of the six speakers had significant differences (see Table 1). STEM participants evaluated these two speakers significantly higher than non-STEM participants. This shows that the differences in the evaluations of other speakers between STEM and non-STEM participants were not significantly different.

Table 1 indicates that when the results of the effect of discipline on the status ratings of the six speakers were considered separately, two differences reached statistical significance:

1. HE female: F (1, 404) = 16.956, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .040$, which is a small effect size.
2. IE male: F (1, 404) = 12.332, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .030$, which is a small effect size.

5.1.2 | Discipline and speaker solidarity

A one-way between-group MANOVA was performed to investigate the effect of discipline on the participants' evaluations of speaker solidarity. The solidarity ratings of all six speakers were the dependent variables, whereas discipline was the independent variable. Figure 2 presents the mean scores of the participants' ratings of the speakers on the solidarity dimension.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices (Box's $M < .001$); thus, Pillai's Trace was reported because it is more robust when the homogeneity of variance–covariance test is violated. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance exceeded .05 for all speakers. The results of the MANOVA test showed a significant main effect of discipline on the evaluation of speaker solidarity: F (6, 399) = 3.630, $p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .075; $\eta^2 p = .075$ (a medium effect). This result indicates significant differences in the evaluations of any of the six speakers between non-STEM and STEM participants. At a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .003, the test of between-subjects effects demonstrated that three (IE, HE males and HE female) out of the six speakers had significant differences (see Table 2). The STEM participants evaluated these three speakers significantly higher than non-STEM participants. This result shows that the differences in the evaluations of other speakers between STEM and non-STEM participants were not significantly different.

Table 2 shows that when the results of the effect of discipline on the solidarity ratings of the six speakers were considered separately, three differences reached statistical significance:

1. HE male: F (2, 404) = 9.455, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 p = .023$, a small effect size.
2. HE female: F (1, 404) = 23.514, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .055$, a small effect size.
3. IE male: F (1, 404) = 13.231, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .032$, a small effect size.

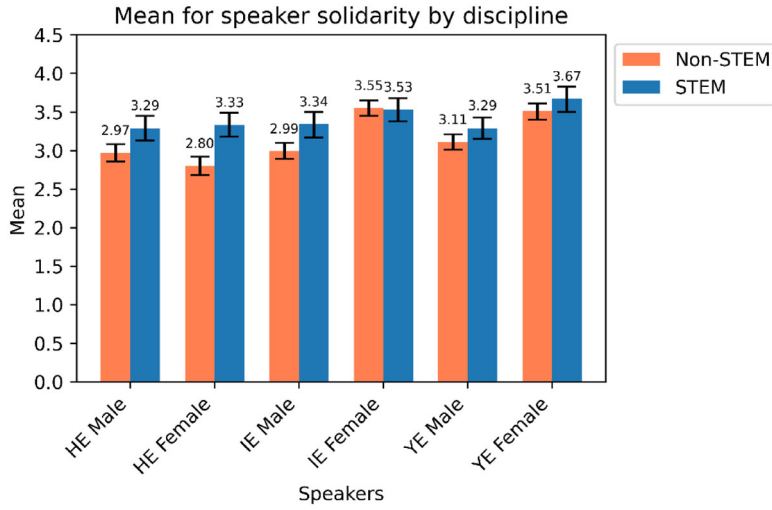

FIGURE 2 Mean evaluations for speaker solidarity by discipline. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 2 Test of between-subject effects for speaker solidarity by discipline.

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	Sig.	η^2_p
Discipline	**HE male**	8.087	1	8.087	9.455	**.002**	.023
	HE female	22.540	1	22.540	23.514	**<.001**	.055
	IE male	10.368	1	10.368	13.231	**<.001**	.032
	IE female	0.043	1	0.043	0.058	.809	<.001
	YE male	2.700	1	2.700	3.733	.054	.009
	YE female	2.126	1	2.126	2.584	.109	.006

5.1.3 | Discipline and speaker quality of language

A one-way between-group MANOVA was conducted to investigate the effect of discipline on the participants' evaluations of the speaker's quality of language. Again, the dependent variables were the quality of language ratings of all six speakers, while discipline was the independent variable. Figure 3 presents the mean scores of the participants' ratings of the speakers on the quality of language dimension.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices (Box's $M < .001$); thus, Pillai's Trace was reported because it is more robust when the homogeneity of variance–covariance test is violated. The results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variance exceeded .05 for all speakers. The results of the MANOVA test showed a significant main effect of discipline on the evaluation of speaker quality of language: F (6, 399) = 6.772, $p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .092; $\eta^2 p = .075$ (a medium effect). This result indicates significant differences in the evaluations of any of the six speakers between non-STEM and STEM participants. At a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .003, the test of between-subject effects demonstrated that four (IE, HE, YE males and HE female) out of the six speakers had significant differences (see Table 3). The STEM participants evaluated these four speakers significantly higher than non-STEM participants. This result shows no significant difference between the STEM and non-STEM participants' evaluations of IE and YE female speakers.

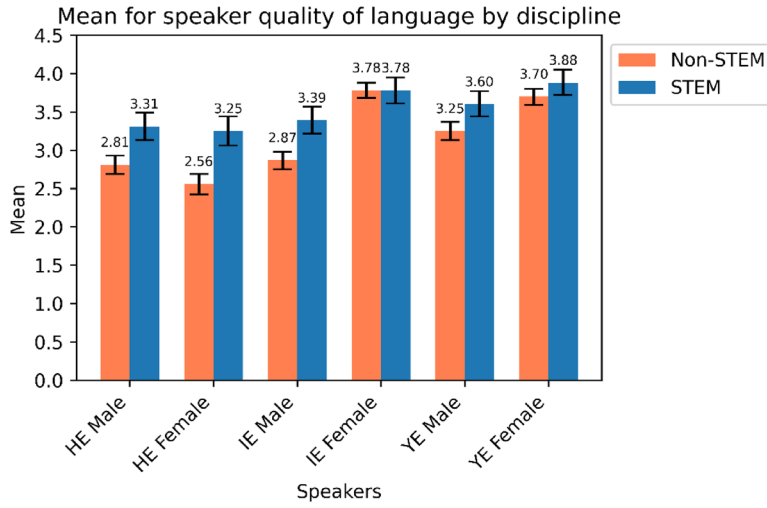

FIGURE 3 Mean evaluations for speakers' quality of language by discipline. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 3 Test of between-subject effects for speaker quality of language by discipline.

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	Sig.	η^2_p
Discipline	**HE male**	20.821	1	20.821	19.187	**<.001**	.045
	HE female	38.226	1	38.226	30.549	**<.001**	.070
	IE male	21.642	1	21.642	22.357	**<.001**	.052
	IE female	0.001	1	0.001	0.001	.977	<.001
	YE male	9.965	1	9.965	10.271	**.001**	.045
	YE female	2.418	1	2.418	2.784	.096	.007

Table 3 shows that when the results of the effect of discipline on the quality of language ratings of the six speakers were considered separately, four differences reached statistical significance:

1. HE male: $F(2, 404) = 19.187$, $p < .002$, $\eta^2 p = .045$, a small effect size.
2. HE female: $F(1, 404) = 30.549$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .070$, a medium effect size.
3. IE male: $F(1, 404) = 22.357$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .052$, a small effect size.
4. YE male: $F(1, 404) = 10.271$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .025$, a small effect size.

Overall, regarding the tests that yielded statistical significance, the STEM participants consistently rated the speakers more favourably than non-STEM participants. The results in Figures 1, 2 and 3 showed that the mean differences between the IE male and HE female speakers were consistently significant on the status, solidarity and quality of language dimensions. With no significant difference for the IE and YE female speakers, it can be concluded that the participants tended to converge in their favourable ratings of these speakers.

5.2 | The main effects of type of secondary school on speaker evaluation

This section presents the results of the main effects of participants' type of secondary school on the ratings of the six speakers. The type of secondary school as the independent variable had two levels: private ($n = 214$, 52.7%) and government ($n = 192$, 47.3%). The dependent variables were the ratings of the six speakers.

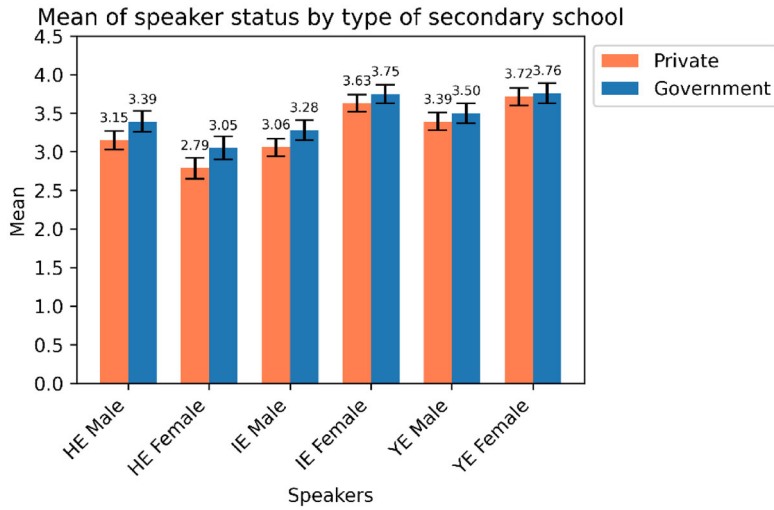

FIGURE 4 Mean evaluations for speaker status by type of secondary school. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

5.2.1 | Type of secondary school and speaker status

A one-way between-group MANOVA was performed to investigate the type of secondary school differences in the participants' evaluations of speaker status. The status ratings of all six speakers were the dependent variables, whereas the type of secondary school was the independent variable. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices (Box's M = .712) and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance (exceeded .05 for all speakers), and no violations were observed. Although there were differences in the mean scores for speaker evaluation based on the status dimension (Figure 4), the results of the MANOVA test showed no significant main effect of type of secondary school on the evaluation of speaker status: F (6, 399) = 1.807, p = .096, Pillai's Trace = .026; $\eta^2 p$ = .026 (a small effect). As none of the results yielded statistical significance, it was unimportant to report the results of the univariate analysis for each speaker. Based on these results, type of secondary school had no statistically significant effect on the participants' evaluations of the speakers based on status.

5.2.2 | Type of secondary school and speaker solidarity

A one-way between-group MANOVA was performed to investigate the effect of the type of secondary school on participants' evaluations of speaker solidarity. The solidarity ratings of all six speakers were the dependent variables, whereas the type of secondary school was the independent variable. Figure 5 presents the mean scores of the participants' ratings of the speakers on the solidarity dimension.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices (Box's M = .204) and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance (exceeded .05 for all speakers), and no violations were found. The results of the MANOVA test demonstrated no significant main effect of the type of secondary school on the evaluation of speaker solidarity: F (6, 399) = 2.185, p = .044, Pillai's Trace = .032; $\eta^2 p$ = .032 (a small effect). Given this non-significance, further univariate tests were not performed.

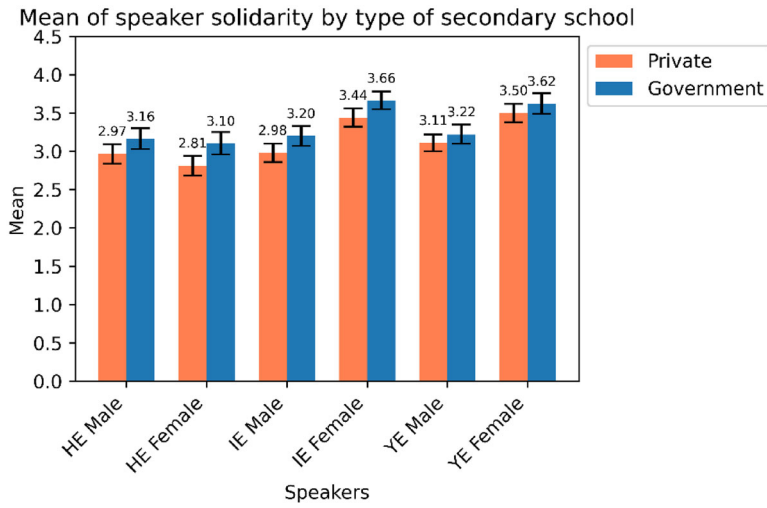

FIGURE 5 Mean evaluations for speaker solidarity by type of secondary school. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

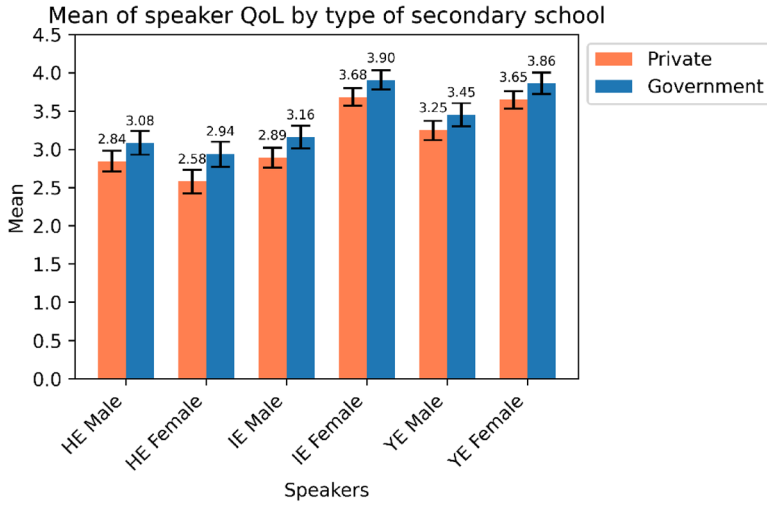

FIGURE 6 Mean evaluations for speakers' quality of language by type of secondary school. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

5.2.3 | Type of secondary school and speaker quality of language

A one-way between-group MANOVA was conducted to investigate the effect of the type of secondary school on participants' evaluations of speaker quality of language. Again, the dependent variables were the quality of language ratings of all six speakers, while the type of secondary school was the independent variable. Figure 6 presents the mean scores of the participants' ratings of the speakers on the quality of language dimension.

Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices, and the results indicated that Box's *M* was nonsignificant ($p = .878$). The results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variance exceeded .05 for all speakers. These results show that no violations were recorded. The results of the MANOVA test

TABLE 4 Test of between-subject effects for speaker quality of language by type of secondary school.

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	Sig.	η^2_p
Type of secondary school	HE male	5.784	1	5.784	5.154	.024	.013
	HE female	13.014	1	13.014	9.906	**.002**	.024
	IE male	7.227	1	7.227	7.201	.008	.018
	IE female	4.821	1	4.821	6.247	.013	.015
	YE male	3.882	1	3.882	3.940	.048	.010
	YE female	4.314	1	4.314	4.994	.026	.012

showed a significant main effect of the type of secondary school on the evaluation of speaker quality of language: $F(6, 399) = 2.298$, $p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .033; $\eta^2 p = .033$ (a small effect). This indicates that significant differences existed in the evaluations of any of the six speakers between participants who attended private secondary schools and those who attended government schools. At a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .003, the test of between-subjects effects demonstrated that one (HE female) out of the six speakers had significant differences (see Table 4). Participants who attended government schools evaluated the HE female significantly higher than those who attended private secondary schools. This result shows that the former had a more positive attitude towards these speakers than the latter.

Table 4 shows that when the results of the effect of the type of secondary school on the quality of language ratings of the six speakers were considered separately, one difference reached statistical significance:

1. HE female: $F(1, 404) = 9.906$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 p = .024$, a small effect size.

The results of the effect of the type of secondary school participants attended on their evaluation of the speakers indicated no significant difference in the participants' evaluation of speakers on status and solidarity dimensions (Figure 4). On the quality of language dimension, where a significant difference was observed, only the evaluations of the HE female speaker yielded statistical significance between participants who attended private and government secondary schools. In this case of statistical significance, the result showed that participants who attended government schools rated the speakers higher than those who attended private secondary schools. The result indicated that participants had dissimilar attitudes towards the HE female speaker on the quality of language dimension.

6 | DISCUSSION

6.1 | Discipline

The results of the effects of discipline on the evaluation of speakers show that STEM participants rated the speakers significantly higher than non-STEM participants. This result indicates that STEM participants were more generous in their ratings than their non-STEM counterparts. This result deviates from our expectation that non-STEM participants would demonstrate less linguistic bias than STEM participants because they had been trained to believe that no variety is better than the other. As discipline may not have been previously considered as a social variable in language attitude research, comparing the findings of this study with those of previous studies presents a challenge that requires careful consideration and interpretation. One possible explanation for the lower ratings given by non-STEM participants compared to STEM participants is that a significant proportion of non-STEM participants (69.6%) were students enrolled in language-related courses, such as English and Literary Studies and English Education. It is possible that since these students have also been trained to be language analysts and 'grammarians', they may have used

this training to evaluate speakers more critically than STEM participants, who may have a different set of expectations and norms regarding language use. From a folk linguistic perspective, it has been argued that non-linguists have limited awareness of the phonological details of an accent (Labov, 1994; Preston, 1996); hence, they may be less critical in their evaluations of varieties.

Additionally, it can also be argued that non-STEM participants are more conversant with the exemplar model of SBE than STEM participants; hence, they have a higher propensity to negatively evaluate speakers who do not speak this exemplar variety (Pierrehumbert, 2006). For instance, in one of the focus groups in northern Nigeria, one of the participants highlighted the difference between his linguistic behaviour and that of other students thus:

> Okay, realistically, ah:: in way, in terms of oral, you see, if you are not in English department when you are speaking, some people say you are speaking through nose in the sense that by the time you are to pronounce the word something like 'come' ((/kʌm/)), somebody that doesn't understand the English will just say 'come' ((/kɒm/)), it is not ((/kɒm/)), it is what? ((/kʌm/)) that is, you speak in oral, so sometimes if you are not in the department, if you are not *Englishians*, they will laugh at you.

In the above extract, the participant indicates the linguistic difference between students of English and other departments. He highlights the efforts of language students to speak the standardised variety, which nonlanguage students ridicule. This ridicule may be employed as a tactic to reduce the manifestation of linguistic supremacy that non-STEM students can exhibit in front of their STEM counterparts. Therefore, it can be argued that since several STEM students may be less concerned about the 'standardness' of speech, it may explain why they were more generous in their ratings than non-STEM participants.

Based on the foregoing, the significant effects of discipline on the evaluation of Nigerian Englishes can be interpreted from the perspective of community of practice, which argues that individuals from different areas, STEM and non-STEM in this case, have different evaluations of the same varieties and speakers (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2011; Prikhodkine & Preston, 2015). These two groups may have developed social networks around the category of discipline (Milroy, 1987). The interpretation of the findings within a community of practice framework indicates that categories such as age, gender and ethnicity are not the only social variables that impact language attitudes; discipline is also a critical determinant of language attitudes.

6.2 | Type of secondary school education

Regarding the effects of secondary school education on speakers' evaluations of status and solidarity dimensions, the results indicated no significant difference between participants who attended government and private secondary schools. However, a significant difference was found in evaluating the HE female speaker on quality of language dimension. Dragojevic (2020) reaches a similar conclusion that fluency can directly affect language attitudes. The result showed that government school participants were significantly more positive towards the HE female speaker than private school participants. A possible reason for this significant difference based on secondary education is the extent of funding, quality of teachers and facilities in government and private secondary schools. In most cases in Nigeria, private educational institutions are well-equipped and infrastructurally better than the government because of inadequate support from the government for government-owned institutions (Baum et al., 2018). Private schools know that they compete with one another; therefore, they endeavour to deliver relatively good education to remain competitive. Many parents who can afford private schools enrol their children there. Owing to the relatively high quality of teachers in private schools, quality assurance and the use of technology in language learning, private secondary school students are more proficient in English than government secondary school students (Ajia, 2018; Omachonu, 2019).

The emphasis on language proficiency may have resulted in the non-significance of status and solidarity ratings, given that these factors may not be as relevant as quality of language for the participants in this study. A possible

reason for the statistical significance on all the dimensions concerning the effect of discipline on the evaluations of HE, IE and YE compared to one statistical significance with respect to the effects of type of secondary school is the recency of participating in these communities of practice. Given that the participants completed their secondary school a few years ago, their mutual engagement with their secondary school peers may have waned. Thus, their participation in and alignment with the activities of their discipline, which is the current community of practice they identify with, may have a stronger influence on their linguistic behaviour and attitudes.

The results of this study align with those of previous studies that found a relationship between the type of secondary school and language proficiency. Stell (2022) examined the perception and recognition of ethnicity in Namibian English and found that Ovambo and Baster speakers who attended government schools had more ethnic-sounding speech than those who attended private schools. Based on the tendency of participants who attended private schools to have more access to an exemplar model of English (SBE) than participants who attended government schools, this may explain why the former rated the HE female speakers lower on quality of language than the latter.

Similarly, Mesthrie (2017) studied the production of schwa in initial, medial and final positions by 33 Black speakers of Black South African English (BSAE) who had some model-C schooling (private and prestigious high schools also attended by Whites) and 20 Black speakers of BSAE who had no model-C schooling. He found a significant difference between the participants' realisations of schwa. The pronunciation of schwa by participants who had model-C schooling approximates to the WSAE variety, while that of participants with no model-C schooling has features of BSAE. Mesthrie (2017) concluded that due to the model-C form of education, the main features of traditional BSAE are eschewed, and there is a crossing over to WSAE because it is considered more prestigious.

One noticeable result is that irrespective of the educational variables, participants did not differ significantly in their evaluations of the IE and YE female speakers. This is possibly because participants considered this southern female speech to be close to SBE. This result indicates a change in progress among southern female speech from ethnic-sounding to ethnically neutral speech. Since this consistent lack of significant difference does not apply to the HE female speaker, it can be argued that the perceived 'standardness' of the IE and YE female speech partly corroborates sociolinguistic findings that women are initiators and agents of language change (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Stell, 2022).

7 | CONCLUSION

This study has examined the effects of participants' discipline and type of secondary school education on the evaluation of HE, IE and YE accents. The results indicated significant effects of the educational variables on language attitudes. STEM participants rated the varieties more favourably than non-STEM participants. Additionally, participants who attended government secondary schools were fairly more generous in evaluating the varieties than those who attended private secondary schools. These results align with those in the literature that found that educational background can predict language attitudes (Aboh, 2023a; Garrett et al., 2003) and extend the scholarship on attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes and the interrelationship between education and language attitudes. From a community of practice perspective, one conclusion that emerges from the results is that the attitudes of different groups of participants are a reification of their practices and a shared repertoire owing to their mutual engagement. In Section 2, I hypothesised that non-STEM participants would rate the speakers more favourably than STEM participants, given their training that no accent or variety is superior to the other. However, contrary to expectations, non-STEM participants rated the speakers less favourably. This deviation confirms Wenger's (1998) argument that ideological differences rather than consensus are common within a community of practice. Therefore, it is possible that the ideology of those in language sciences that they are 'grammarians' and 'phoneticians' may have dominated their evaluations of the varieties, thereby making them highly critical of some speakers.

The less favourable ratings of the varieties by participants who attended private secondary schools may have implications for educational policies in Nigeria. These ratings may be a result of their access to more quality educational

resources that improve their English learning skills compared with their counterparts who attended government secondary schools. The results may also reflect the inequalities in language learning opportunities between these two groups, which may perpetuate the negative evaluations of speakers perceived as not speaking the standardised variety of English. Consequently, it is crucial for the government to promote equal access to language education for all individuals (Cushing, 2022) by providing educational resources to educational institutions. There is also the need to move towards a 'socially realistic linguistics' where Nigerian Englishes are not perceived as corruptions or grammarless but as reflections of speakers' creativity and forms of human communication (Winford, 2003, p. 21).

Given that the educational variables explored in this study have not been sufficiently studied in language attitude research, it is imperative that future studies explore these variables in other sociolinguistic contexts for a comprehensive understanding of their effects on language attitudes and to validate the results of the present research. To validate the claim that current participation in a community of practice may have stronger effects on language attitudes, future studies may explore current private and government secondary school students' attitudes towards Nigerian Englishes. With recent calls to investigate language attitudes in discourse (Aboh & Ladegaard, 2025), future research may examine how attitudes based on educational backgrounds are constructed in discourse.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None.

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