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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### WRITING ANXIETY AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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#### Abstract

English is a ubiquitous part of the educational landscape of Nigeria and represents the most crucial subject in the school curriculum. English as a second language in Nigeria has been fraught with several challenges encompassing speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Perhaps, writing skill is a complex part of English that impedes education development in many instances. The present study examined the correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty among undergraduates. Two hundred and fourteen undergraduates enrolled in a public higher institution in Anambra state participated in the study. A correlational research design was adopted, and the analysis indicated a positive correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty. The study concludes that writing anxiety is a significant determinant of cheating in undergraduates.

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#### Introduction:-

Although Nigeria has over five hundred native languages, English is generally considered its official language (Mercy, 2019). Perhaps, the multilingual aspect of the country exacerbates English as a ubiquitous channel of communication among the people (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). In particular, the educational ecosystem of the country is mainly dependent on English in the teaching and learning process. Notably, English is central to everyday interpersonal communication across all domains of society (Abubakar, 2018; Adebileje & Akinola, 2020). More so, there are intimations that English plays an essential role in National integration and development (Adegbite, 2003; Bello et al., 2016; Danladi, 2013; Mgbemena, 2014; Michina & Iskandar, 2019; Nwokoro et al., 2020; Obiegbu, 2015; Ogoanah, 2012; Yusuf, 2012; Ugal, 2012). For instance, Onukaogu (2008) noted that English is acknowledged in Nigeria because of its human and material development role. Thus, emphasis is geared towards developing the four basic skills, listening, reading, speaking, and writing, that characterizes English as a foreign language.

Writing is an essential component of English communication that has attracted colossal research attention in recent years. It is a skill acquired in a gradual and complex process compared to reading, listening, and speaking (Albertson & Billingsley, 2000; Olinghouse & Santangelo, 2017). Writing skills describe the knowledge and abilities related to expressing ideas through the written word, allowing learners to explore thoughts and ideas and make them evident and concrete (Harlena et al., 2019). It is an essential skill in English language acquisition (Ariyanti, 2016) and entails integrating the basic grammatical rules to form meaningful expression. Writing has been widely viewed as a crucially essential skill in teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) (Bsharat & Behak, 2021). Hence it is a comprehensive skill that helps reinforce vocabulary, grammar, thinking, planning, editing, revising, and

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other elements. Technical knowledge about writing conventions, style guides, and formatting for different situations is essential in writing skills.

Writing skill is considered as a complex skill for many ESL students (Graham, 2019; Graham & Alves, 2021; Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Kusumawardhani, 2017; Kusumawati et al., 2020; Munirah, 2017; Patiño et al., 2020; Rao & Durga, 2018; Rosmarie & Mualimin, 2021; Sabti et al., 2019; Sujinah et al., 2019; Suryaman, 2019). Many components need to be integrated into performing this productive skill. However, it denotes the pathway to understanding students learning outcomes. Perhaps, students are expected to transform the idea they already had by constructing any information from their schemas. Thus, it contributes to students' academic success and future career prospects (Etim, 2019; Naghdipour, 2021).

Nigeria's education development has been fraught with numerous challenges, including communicating in writing (Aina, 2017; Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Poor writing skills are expressed in poor writing mechanics, grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. The lack of students' vocabulary mastery, words order, and paragraph development causes low motivation to develop writing skills. The challenge of poor writing abilities at the postsecondary level is pervasive (Perin & Lauterbach, 2018) and constitutes a considerable concern in the education sector of every society. In Nigeria, ESL is a compulsory subject in the academic curriculum at all levels. Students are exposed to basic skills of English from the early learning stage, beginning from the preparatory classes to higher education. In particular, writing reflects a fundamental component of teaching and learning. Consequently, most students at the undergraduate level find it difficult to fully express their knowledge in a written form thereby, instigating a wide variety of anxious and pessimistic feelings about writing. Thus, resulting in a psychological state of writing anxiety. The primary purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty.

#### **Writing anxiety and academic dishonesty**

Anxiety is one of the psychological aspects of the learner's factors, which prevents them from developing their skills when learning English as a foreign or second language (Talib & Fook, 2016; Yassin & Razak, 2017). Writing anxiety reflects a psychological state that exerts extreme distress and pressure in a writing context. Writing anxiety has negatively impacted students' learning motivation (Akbarov & Aydoğan, 2018; Alico, 2016). It encompasses the phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses to writing situations, which are likely to exacerbate during the examination period. Affective variables, such as anxiety, play a considerable role in influencing ESL writing in various studies. Numerous literatures abound that suggest a negative impact of writing anxiety on student's writing performance (Cruz, 2021; Daud et al., 2016; Karlina & Hidayanto, 2018; Kurniasih, 2017; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Rasuan & Wati, 2021; Saedpanah, 2020; Septiani et al., 2021; Shehzadi & Krishnasamy, 2018; Soleimani et al., 2020; Surur & Dengela, 2019; Tsai, Pi-Chen; Cheng, 2009). Such studies have mainly affirmed that writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy may significantly boost writing performance, whereas writing anxiety could highly influence writing ability in negative ways (Jawas, 2019). In other words, such factors play a considerable role in students' behavior that could lead to dishonesty in the examination.

Academic dishonesty reflects the unethical behavior of students relative to academic assessments and practices. It describes academic behavior that deviates from institutional standards relating to examinations and other institutional objectives (Bayaa et al., 2016). Academic dishonesty occurs when students seek to gain unwarranted benefits relative to assessment (Guthrie, 2009). It reflects an unethical and dishonest intellectual thievery that might negatively impact institutional reputation and the development of any society (Maina et al., 2014). Faucher & Caves (2009) described academic dishonesty as giving or receiving information from others through unlawful materials and evading the approved assessment process in an educational context.

Nevertheless, dishonesty in academia reflects a multifaceted behavior influenced by numerous situational, contextual, and individual qualities (Fields, 2003). For instance, research has correlated study level and gender (Ampuni et al., 2020), sensation seeking and self-control (Portnoy et al., 2019), pressure for a good grade, and time scarcity (Bachore, 2016) with academic dishonesty. However, affective states, including writing anxiousness, could instigate a heightened level of worry, fear, and extreme concern about the inability to communicate learned materials in writing. Thus, those students who cannot write correctly maybe more likely to explore other means of passing their exams than their counterparts who can communicate effectively in writing.

**Hypothesis:** Writing anxiety will positively correlate with academic dishonesty among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

**Method:-**

A correlational research design was implemented in the study. The population included undergraduates from tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. The samples for the study included males and females conveniently pooled from public and private higher education institutions in the state.

**Measure:-**

Writing anxiety was measured using a modified version of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) initially developed by (Cheng 2004). The scale is a 22-item instrument designed to measure students' English writing experience. The scale measures three categories of anxieties including, somatic anxiety (as reflected in negative feelings such as tension and nervousness), cognitive anxiety (as reflected in negative expectations, preoccupation with performance, worry or fear of negative evaluation), and avoidance behavior (as reflected in avoidance in writing). The scale is scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a higher level of writing anxiety.

Academic dishonesty was assessed using the Academic dishonesty scale (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The scale is a 12-item scale to measure dishonest behaviors among students. Respondents are allowed to identify the frequency with which they had been involved in cheating behaviors on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from never = 1 to many times = 5. Items include: "copying from another student without their permission," "helping someone to cheat on an exam." Scores on the scale ranged from 12 to 60, with a higher score indicating frequent academic dishonesty. The scale has been previously used in the Nigerian context by (Onu et al., 2021), and Cronbach's alpha of .87 was recorded on the scale.

**Result:-**

A Pearson's product-moment correlation was performed to assess the relationship between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty among undergraduates in tertiary institutions. Two hundred and fourteen participants were recruited. Analyses revealed that the relationship is linear, both variables were normally distributed as calculated by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p > .05$ ), and no outliers were observed. However, the analysis showed a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty ( $r(212) = .37, p < .001$ ), with writing concern explaining 21% of the variation in academic dishonesty.

**Table 1:-** Table showing correlation between the main variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2
1. Writing anxiety	3.29	0.34	.12**	
2. Academic dishonesty	4.71	0.42	-.33	.37**
$R^2$	.21			

Note.  $N = 214$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

**Discussion:-**

The current study was aimed to examine the correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Two hundred and fourteen participants completed the survey instrument, and the Pearson's product-moment correlation analyses indicated a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty,  $r(212) = .37, p < .001$ , with writing concern explaining 21% of the variation in academic dishonesty. Thus, the result supports the assumption that the affective state of anxiousness relative to English writing significantly correlated with the student's intention to engage in cheating behavior. Indeed, among other intervening variables in academic dishonesty in academia, writing anxiety as a factor positively contributes to the growing cheating behavior in tertiary institutions. The study's outcome also means that the increasing incidence of exam malpractices, plagiarism, bribery, and impersonation commonly witnessed in most institutions of higher learning, including secondary schools, could be partly attributed to anxiousness occasioned by the inability to communicate in learned materials in writing form effectively. This presupposes that those students under distress due to writing concerns are more likely to succeed using an unethical approach.

The finding of this study shows that the subjective affective reactions that some students exhibit in response to exams provide the pathway for students' engagement in dishonest academic behaviors. The study's result corroborates previous studies that found a positive correlation between test anxiety and academic cheating (Behroozi

et al., 2017; Hammoudi & Benzerroug, 2021; Mih & Mih, 2016; Nwosu et al., 2020; Wenzel & Reinhard, 2020). For instance, the finding is aligned with a previous study which found that about 34.2% of the total variation in dishonest tendencies is accounted for by test anxiety (Bassey & Iruoje, 2017). Hence, the result impacted knowledge regarding unethical behaviors in tertiary institutions. The current finding could be explained in line with the understanding that the inability to express learning in writing and fear of failure triggers the state of anxiety and exacerbate alternative behavior. A previous study suggests that self-doubt during exam preparation (Encandela et al., 2014) can worsen writing anxiety and facilitate dishonest behavior. The current finding confirms writing anxiety as a correlate of dishonesty in academia. Thus, the study provides evidence of the contributory role of writing anxiety on cheating behavior in academia.

### **The implication of the study**

This study demonstrated that writing anxiety could provide a suitable pathway to academic dishonesty in undergraduate students. This could impact learning outcomes and jeopardize academic integrity in contemporary education society. Indeed, the result has implications for intellectual development and institutional integrity. It provided valuable data to educators and counselors in managing the menace of academic dishonesty in tertiary institutions in Anambra State and Nigeria in general.

### **Conclusion:-**

The present study examined the correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty in undergraduates. Based on the analysis conducted on the data, the finding demonstrated that writing anxiety positively correlated with cheating behavior. Indeed, the study provides evidence linking writing anxiety to cheating behavior in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. Therefore, the expectation of the study is met. The findings contribute to the literature by revealing writing anxiety as a psychological concern that could motivate cheating in academic engagements, including examination, presentations, and debates. Although, the study is challenged with certain limitations. For instance, the study was unable to determine the cause-effect relationship. Future researchers should employ an experimental approach. Also, the self-reported measures could give room for bias reporting. Thus, a multiple data collection method might limit the incidence of false information. However, the study recommends that language instructors deploy a robust approach that exposes the learners to persistent writing. The use of online writing tools, such as PBworks, has proven significant in improving writing skills. Therefore, educators are encouraged to access technological opportunities to enhance writing.

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