

## WRITING ANXIETY AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Over the years, English as a second language has assumed an essential part of Nigeria's educational system and represents the most crucial subject in the school curriculum. Consequently, English has been fraught with several challenges encompassing speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Indeed, writing skill is a complex part of English that impedes education development in many instances. The present study examined writing anxiety as a possible correlate of academic dishonesty among undergraduates. Two hundred and forty-eight undergraduates enrolled in a public higher institution in Enugu state participated in the study. A cross-sectional research design was employed, and the analysis established a statistically significant interaction between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty  $F(1,246), 31.42, P < .000$ . Most importantly, the  $R^2$  indicated that writing anxiety contributed about 13.3% of the variance in academic dishonesty among the respondents. The study concludes that writing anxiety is a significant determinant of dishonest behavior in undergraduates.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Writing anxiety, academic dishonesty, undergraduates, tertiary institutions*

## BACKGROUND

Even though Nigeria has over 500 local languages, English is often regarded as the country's official language (Mercy, 2019). Perhaps the country's multilingualism exacerbates English as a standard mode of communication among the population (Fakeye & Ogunsiyi, 2009). The country's educational ecology, in particular, is heavily reliant on English in the teaching and learning process. English is critical in everyday interpersonal interactions in all aspects of life (Adebileje and Akinola, 2020; Abubakar, 2018). Furthermore, there are suggestions that English plays an essential role in national cohesion and growth (Adegbiite, 2003; Bello et al., 2016; Danladi, 2013; Mgbemena, 2014; Michina & Iskanda, 2019; Nwokoro et al., 2020; Obiegbu, 2015; Ogoannah, 2012; Yusuf, 2012; Ugal, 2012). For example, Onukaogu (2008) stated that English is recognized in Nigeria because of its significance in human and material growth. As a result, the emphasis is on improving the four core abilities that distinguish English as a foreign language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Writing is an integral part of English communication that has received much study attention in recent years. Compared to listening and speaking, it is a talent developed gradually and over time (Albertson & Billingsley, 2000; Olinghouse & Santangelo, 2017). Writing skills refer to the knowledge and talents associated with expressing ideas through the written word, allowing students to explore concepts and ideas and make them visible and tangible (Harlena et al., 2019). It is a necessary ability in English language learning (Ariyanti, 2016), and it requires combining fundamental grammar principles to generate meaningful discourse. Writing is essential in teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) (Bsharat & Behak, 2021). As a result, it is a multifaceted talent that aids in reinforcing vocabulary, grammar, thinking, planning, editing, and revising.

Writing skill reflects a complex skill for many ESL students (Graham, 2019; Graham & Alves, 2021; Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Kusumawadhani, 2017; Kusumawati et al., 2020; Munira, 2017; Patino et al., 2020; Rao & Durga, 2018; Rosemarie & Mualimin, 2021; Sabti et al., 2019; Sujinah et al., 2019; Suryamman, 2019). This productive ability requires the integration of several components. It does, however, represent the road to comprehending pupils' learning results. Students are supposed to build any knowledge from their schemas to modify the notion they previously had. As a result, it helps students achieve academic achievement and improve their employment chances. (Naghdipour, 2021; Etim, 2019).

Nigeria's educational progress has been plagued with limitations, including writing communication (Aina, 2017; Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Poor writing techniques, grammar, spelling, and sentence construction are signs of poor writing skills. A weak desire to improve writing abilities stems from pupils' lack of vocabulary knowledge, word order, and paragraph development. Poor writing abilities at the postsecondary level are widespread (Perin & Lauterbach, 2018), and they are a significant source of worry in every society's education sector. ESL is a required course in Nigeria's academic curriculum. Beginning in preparatory schools and continuing through higher education, students are exposed to fundamental English abilities. Writing, in particular, is an essential aspect of teaching and learning. As a result, most undergraduate students find it challenging to adequately communicate their knowledge in writing, leading to a range of nervous and negative sentiments about writing. As a result, a psychological condition of writing anxiety develops. The study's primary goal is to see if writing anxiety is linked to academic dishonesty.

### Writing anxiety and academic dishonesty

Anxiety is one psychological element that stops learners from strengthening their abilities when studying English as a second or foreign language (Talib & Fook, 2016; Yassin & Razak, 2017). Writing anxiety is a psychological state characterized by great anguish and strain when writing. Students' learning motivation has been significantly influenced by writing anxiety (Akbarov & Aydoan, 2018; Alico, 2016). It includes phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral reactions to writing settings, which are expected to worsen over the test time. Affective factors such as anxiety have a significant impact on ESL writing. Numerous studies have found that writing anxiety has a poor influence on student writing performance (Cruz, 2021; Daud et al., 2016; Karlina & Hidayyanto, 2018; Kurniasih, 2017; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Rasuan, 2017). Such studies have confirmed that writing achievement motivation and writing self-efficacy may significantly boost writing performance, whereas writing anxiety could negatively influence writing ability (Jawas, 2019).

In other words, such circumstances play a significant effect on students' behavior, which may lead to examination dishonesty.

Academic dishonesty refers to students' unethical activity when it comes to academic assessments and procedures. It relates to academic behavior that deviates from institutional standards when it comes to exams and other institutional goals (Bayaa et al., 2016). Academic dishonesty happens when students attempt to acquire unfair advantages in the evaluation process (Guthrie, 2009). It depicts unethical and dishonest intellectual theft that might harm an institution's reputation as well as a society's progress (Maina et al., 2014). Academic dishonesty, according to Faucher & Caves (2009), is defined as acquiring or transferring information from others using illegal means and avoiding the approved evaluation process in an educational setting.

Nonetheless, academic dishonesty is a multidimensional activity driven by a variety of situational, contextual, and individual factors (Fields, 2003). For example, studies have linked academic dishonesty with study level and gender (Ampuni et al., 2020), sensation seeking and self-control (Portnoy et al., 2019), pressure for a good score, and time scarcity

(Bachore, 2016). Affective states, such as writing anxiety, can cause an increase in worry, dread, and great concern over not being able to transmit learned content in writing. As a result, students who struggle to write correctly may be more tempted to look for other ways to pass their tests.

**Hypothesis:** *Writing anxiety will significantly predict academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Enugu State.*

**Method participants**

The data were collected using the convenience sampling method based on availability and willingness to join the study. Participants were drawn from students enrolled in different academic disciplines in three institutions of higher learning in the Enugu State, Nigeria. Two hundred and forty-eight students, 118 males and 130 females consented to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years (M = 21.4, SD = 1.92). They were majors in various fields such as the social sciences, languages, technology, and science. Indeed, English is taught in all departments as a general course. The participants completed a concept form, and all other ethical principles were duly observed.

**Measure**

The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) was updated to evaluate writing anxiety (Cheng 2004). The scale is a 22-item tool that assesses pupils' English writing abilities. Somatic anxiety (as expressed in unpleasant sensations like tightness and uneasiness), cognitive anxiety (as reflected in negative expectations, obsession with performance, worry or dread of flawed assessment), and avoidance behavior are all measured on the scale (as reflected in avoidance in writing).

The scale is a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). A higher score suggests more nervousness about writing.

The Academic Dishonesty Scale (McCabe & Trevino, 1997) measured academic dishonesty. The scale is a 12-item questionnaire used to assess pupils' dishonesty. Respondents are asked to rate how frequently they have engaged in dishonest activities on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from never = 1 to many times = 5. "Copying from another student without their permission" and "assisting someone to cheat on an exam" are two examples. The measure had a scale of 12 to 60, with a higher score suggesting regular academic dishonesty. The scale had already been utilized in the Nigerian setting by (Onu et al., 2021), and it had a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

**Result**

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Data from the respondents were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, v17). A simple regression analysis was conducted to test the assumption that writing anxiety will significantly predict academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Enugu State. The investigation established a statistically significant interaction between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty  $F(1,246), 31.42, P < .000$ . Most importantly, the  $R^2$  indicated that writing anxiety contributed to about 13.3% of the variance in academic dishonesty among the respondents.

**Table 1:**

The table shows the regression analysis's outcome conducted to determine the effect of writing anxiety and academic dishonesty.

	B	SEB	$\beta$	t	Sig
Constant	2.85	.032		53.67	.000
WA	-.749	.042	-.710	-16.77	.000
$R^2$		.133			

Note. W A = Writing anxiety; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient;  $\beta$  = Standardized coefficient;  $R^2$  = Coefficient of determination. \* $P < .000$ .

**Discussion**

The current study examined academic dishonesty among undergraduates in Enugu state based on writing anxiety. Two hundred and forty-eight respondents completed the survey instrument, and the simple regression analysis conducted on the data showed a statistically significant interaction between the variable. Thus, showing that writing anxiety positively predicted academic dishonesty among the respondents. Furthermore, the result revealed that writing anxiety explained about 13.3% of the variation in academic dishonesty among the students. Indeed, the finding aligns with the study's hypothesis, which states that the affective state of anxiousness relative to The student's inclination to cheat would be strongly predicted by their English writing. Writing anxiety is a component that positively contributes to the development of cheating behavior in the educational sector, among other intervening variables in academic dishonesty. According to the study's findings, the rising incidence of exam malpractices, plagiarism, bribery, and impersonation seen in most

institutions of higher learning, including secondary schools, can be attributed in part to anxiety caused by the inability to communicate learned materials in writing form effectively. This assumes that pupils who are stressed out about their writing will be more prone to achieve using dishonest means.

The study's findings indicate that most students' subjective emotional reactions in response to tests provide a conduit for pupils to engage in dishonest academic conduct. The result is aligned with previous findings indicating 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 example, the finding corroborates Bassey and Iruoje (2017), which reported that about 34.2% of the total variation in dishonest tendencies is accounted for by test anxiety. 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 to manage the menace of academic dishonesty in tertiary institutions in Enugu State and Nigeria.

### Conclusion

The present study examined the predictor role of writing anxiety in academic dishonesty in undergraduates. Based on the analysis conducted on the data, the finding demonstrated that writing anxiety positively predicted cheating behavior. Indeed, the study provides evidence linking writing anxiety to cheating behavior in higher education in Enugu State, Nigeria. Therefore, the expectation of the study is affirmed. The findings contribute to the literature by revealing writing anxiety as a psychological concern that could motivate cheating in academic engagements, including examinations, assignments, projects, and presentations. 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 biased 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. Using 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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