

DOES WRITING ANXIETY IN GEN Z LEARNERS PREDICT SHARP PRACTICES IN ASSESSMENT?

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Abstract

In Nigeria, English is arguably the most crucial subject in classrooms nationwide. Learning English as a second language has been difficult in Nigeria. This is true across all four skills (listening, reading, and writing). Indeed, the difficulty of mastering written English is a stumbling block to expanding learning opportunities and potentiates the incident of sharp practices in academia. The present study examined the correlation between writing anxiety and sharp practices in assessments among young learners. One hundred eighty-seven undergraduates enrolled in various courses at the Federal College of Education Technical, Omoku, River state, participated in the study. A correlational research design was adopted, and the result indicated a positive correlation between writing anxiety and academic dishonesty. The study concludes that writing anxiety significantly determines cheating in undergraduates.

Keywords: *writing anxiety, sharp practice, Gen Z, assessment.*

BACKGROUND

Sharp practices are among the significant challenge in the world today and a threat to the development of any country (Nkuna et al., 2020). Sharp practices range from higher offices of state institutions to small offices in remote and rural local areas. The education ecosystem is also affected by sharp practices as the teachers and students of these institutions constantly engage in acts typically meant to achieve their selfish interests by boycotting ethical standards and diminishing the educational standards, especially during an assessment. Sharp practice in any nation's educational system describes academic dishonesty reflecting the unethical behavior of students relative to academic assessments. Academic dishonesty refers to actions taken by students that go against a school's rules regarding exams and other scholastic requirements (Bayaa et al., 2016). Students engage in an academic dishonesty when they try to cheat the system and improve their grades without merit (Guthrie, 2009). It indicates unethical and dishonest intellectual theft, which can have a distressing effect on an institution's standing and the progress of any society (Maina et al., 2014). According to Faucher and Caves (2009), academic dishonesty occurs when a student provides or receives information from others using unlawful materials to circumvent the established assessment procedure.

Although Nigeria has over five hundred native languages, English is generally considered its official language (Mercy, 2019). Indeed, 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 (Adebite, 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, which characterize English as a foreign language.

Writing is an essential component of English communication that has recently attracted colossal research attention. 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 ability to express 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 expressions. Writing has been widely viewed as a crucial 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 other elements. Technical knowledge about writing conventions, style guides, and formatting for different situations is essential in writing skills.

Writing skill is considered 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. Indeed, students are expected to transform their idea 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, word 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. ESL is a compulsory subject in the academic curriculum at all levels in Nigeria. 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, instigating a wide variety of anxious and pessimistic feelings about writing, thus, resulting in a psychological state of writing anxiety. The study primarily examines the relationship between writing anxiety and sharp practices in assessments.

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 negatively impacts 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. In various studies, affective variables, such as anxiety, play a considerable role in influencing ESL writing. Numerous literature abounds 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 negatively influence writing ability (Jawas, 2019). In other words, such factors play a considerable role in students' behavior that could lead to dishonesty in the examination.

Nevertheless, sharp academic practice 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 various sharp practices among students. However, affective states, including writing anxiousness, could instigate heightened worry, fear, and extreme concern about the inability to communicate learned materials in writing. Thus, those students who cannot write correctly may be more likely to explore other means of passing their exams than their counterparts who can communicate effectively in writing.

Hypothesis: *Writing anxiety will positively predict sharp practices in assessment among Gen Z learners.*

Research has found that the new age learner, Gen Z, differs from their predecessors (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). The evolutions of the generations significantly impact the changes in our education sector, especially regarding the teaching and learning process (Aziz et al., 2019). The diminishing attention span of students in the contemporary education domain has been an increasing challenge for educators. Gen-Z represents individuals born between 1996-2010 (Lahijanian et al., 2020). The transition was never planned this way (Kellermann, 2021). For instance, observation of the current trends in teaching suggests a shift in the course material from the print room to Learning Management System (LMS). On the other hand, the usual classroom lectures are recorded and published online for students to use. However, intimations suggest that the trend has encouraged students to stop attending lectures because they could watch the recordings at home, leaving it until the week before the exam to binge an entire season of lectures. Indeed, the situation has led to a flip classroom and bite-sized lessons because Gen Z cannot concentrate longer.

Method

A correlational research design was implemented in the study. The population included undergraduates between the ages of 17 and 26 years, comprising males and females enrolled in various courses at the Federal College of Education Technical, Omoku, River State, Nigeria. The students were approached between January and March 2023 and asked to be part of the study. Those who consented (n=202) received instructions, including ethical information, and afterward, responded to the self-report questionnaires on the spot. Only one hundred eighty-seven (187) questionnaires were filled correctly and used for the study. The remaining questionnaires were discarded due to improper filling.

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 can 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" and "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

One hundred and eighty-seven participants were conveniently recruited for the study. Data from the 78 male (38.6%) and 109 female (61.4%) respondents were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 23).

Table 1: shows the correlation between the main variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2
1. Writing anxiety	3.29	0.34	.12**	
2. Sharp practices	4.71	0.42	.33	.37**
R ²	.341			

Note. N = 187, ** = p < .01 (two-tailed).

A Pearson's product-moment correlation was performed to assess the relationship between writing anxiety and sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z. 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 sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z, $r(185) = .37$, $p < .001$, with writing concern explaining 34.1% of the variation in sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z.

Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the correlation between writing anxiety and sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z. One hundred and eighty-seven participants completed the survey instrument. Pearson's product-moment correlation analyses indicated a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between writing anxiety and sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z, $r(185) = .37$, $p < .001$, with writing concern explaining 34.1% of the variation in sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z. 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. The study suggests that writing anxiety might be an intervening variable in sharp practices in academics. Thus, it could positively contribute to the expanding pattern of sharp practices in tertiary institutions. The findings of the study also imply that the growing number of instances of exam malpractices, plagiarism, bribery, and impersonation that are commonly seen in the majority of institutions of higher learning, including secondary schools, could be partially attributed to the anxiety brought on by the inability to effectively express learned materials in writing. This presupposes that students struggling academically due to concerns about their writing are more likely to succeed by employing unethical methods.

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 sharp practices. 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 probable explanation for this outcome might be explained by the intimations suggesting a relationship between the inability to express learning in writing and fear of failure, which exacerbates sharp practices. Previous research suggests that harboring doubts about one's abilities while studying for an examination can worsen writing anxiety and trigger the intention to cheat (Encandela et al., 2014). This study's results further establish that worry about writing is linked to academic dishonesty. Thus, the study's findings support the hypothesis that writing anxiety influences sharp practices in assessments among Gen Z.

The implication of the study

This study demonstrated that writing anxiety could provide a suitable pathway to sharp practices in the education system, especially among young learners. This could compromise modern education standards and affect students' ability to learn. The result has implications for knowledge growth and institutions' stability. It can help teachers and guidance counselors deal with the pervasive cheating problem in higher education.

Conclusion

The present study examined the correlation between Gen Z students' writing anxiety and sharp practices. Based on the analysis conducted on the data, the finding demonstrated that writing anxiety positively correlated with sharp practices. Indeed, the study provides evidence linking writing anxiety to the increasing sharp practices in academia. Therefore, the assumption that writing anxiety will positively predict sharp practices in assessment among Gen Z learners 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, 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 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. Online writing tools, such as PBworks, have significantly improved writing skills. Therefore, educators are encouraged to access technological opportunities to enhance writing.

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