ANXIETY LEVEL AS PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA

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Introduction

School is one of the most competitive environments where performance depends on out-achieving others. This implies that academic activities in school and their outcome might often arouse intense emotions which in one way or the other may likely affect students' academic adjustment. One of the observed emotional problems undergraduate students display in the university includes anxiety in confronting test or examination. (Heath,2008).

Anxiety negatively affects students, more so if the anxiety is dealt with in an unhealthy manner and extends over a long period of time. A lot of undergraduate students are facing this problem today hence, demand urgent attention from well-meaning educators and scholars. Huberty, (1997) defined anxiety as a unique emotional state characterized by feelings of distress and tension about real or anticipated threats that may manifest in cognitive, behavioural, physiological patterns. It is a complex emotional condition which may influence multiple domains of a student's functioning. Specifically, a student may experience cognitive, behavioural, and physiological effects. Common cognitive symptoms of anxiety include excessive worries, concentration difficulties, memory and attention problems. Anxiety may also be manifested through such behavioural symptoms as motor restlessness, difficulty sitting still, and attempts to escape or avoid anxiety-provoking stimuli or situation. Anxiety also includes physiological symptoms, such as muscle tension, increased perspiration, rapid heartbeat, headaches, and stomach-aches (Lopez, 2009).

Commonly observed anxiety symptoms include irritability, muscular tension, inability to concentrate, trembling, depression, irrational behavior, loss of appetite, and a variety of physical reactions such as headaches and accelerated heart rates. All these symptoms may affect academic adjustment among undergraduate students. Again, when a student is asked to stand and speak in front of a class, or is waiting for an examination or test to begin students might feel anxious. At one time or another, most undergraduate

students feel anxious in some social situation to the extent that they may find it difficult to look into someone's eye or talk to someone.

Anxiety has become part of everyday experiences for undergraduate students. Fortunately for most of them, it does not entail intense suffering endured by those with anxiety disorders of which there are three important types: generalized anxiety disorder in which a person for no apparent reason feels uncontrollably tense and uneasy. Phobic disorder in which the person feels irrationally afraid of a specific object or situation and obsessive – compulsive disorder in which the person is troubled by repetitive thoughts and actions (Kremer. 1994)

According to Kring & Gordon, (1998), anxiety as a unique emotion can be viewed in both positive and negative light. A slight amount of anxiety can be helpful, motivate and facilitate a student performance, whereas very high anxiety can be debilitating and hinder performance. For example, a student can become slightly anxious before a major examination. The slight anxiety felt can motivate the student to study for the examination thereby boosting his self-efficacy to do better because of the time spent preparing for the examination. In contrast, high level of anxiety may interfere with the student's ability to concentrate, process information, or retrieve information from long-term memory. Under these circumstances, the student is less likely to perform his or her best in the examination.

Given all of these challenges, it is common for undergraduate students to feel uncertain about their own abilities and express frustration and anxiety over grades that accompanied academic activities which make burning candle at both ends inevitable. Operationally, anxiety is the feeling of fear or panic about existing or presumptuous threat capable of positively or negatively affecting academic adjustment.

Although, the university campus is a regulated academic environment, undergraduate students still feel free and engage in lots of activities that are social, academic and religious in nature which sways their academic adjustment. Lahey (2004) viewed adjustment as the ability of individuals to develop techniques to handle stress and conflict with the amount of support provided by their environment. The author however confirmed that there are no such things as ideally adjusted person. The author further stated that adjustment with university life is considered one of the main indicators of success in university life as it is an indicator for the student's ability to face the problems resulting from fulfilling his academic, social and emotional needs. By adjusting with university life the students will be able to form a kind of good relationships with others in the university leading him to enhance his academic achievement.

The term adjustment refers to the extent to which an individual's personality functions effectively in the world of people. It refers to the harmonious relationship between the person and the environment. In other words, it is the relationship that comes among organisms, the environment and the personality. A 'well-adjusted' personality is well prepared to play the roles which are expected of the status assigned to him within a given environment.(Sabin, 2012).

Academic adjustment refers to the degree of a student's success in coping with various educational demands such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). It is a process involving psychological and behavioral change as individuals try hard to regulate themselves to achieve balance in their new academic environment and to meet the new learning requirements of a university. (Quan,2014). Operationally, academic adjustment refers to individual and specific students' organization of their behavior in order to strike a balance with the academic environment. It is the harmonious interaction between undergraduate students with the university environment.

The notion that women are more anxious than men is entrenched in our cultural beliefs and consistently supported by research on sex linked stereotypes. Men and women typically report differences in their general anxiety level, such as overall anxiety intensity or expressivity as well as in the experience and expression of specific emotions. Despite the popular belief that women are more anxious, sex reviewers and researchers disagree as to whether there is empirical support for sex differences in anxiety expression level and experience. Evidence suggests that women are more verbally and non-verbally expressive of anxiety than are men; women report expressing their fearful feelings with more intensity, more frequent facial expressions of fear and more crying and freezing when afraid (Kring and Gordon, 1998).

Presumably, one of the contentious matters that has assumed significant debates today is the extent anxiety level predicts academic adjustment among students In south-East Nigeria. This has led to the desire to bridge the yawning educational gap between the south-East zone and the other southern geopolitical zones in Nigeria. This perhaps explains why the south-Eastern zone is clamoring for additional state creation so as to provide equal educational opportunities to the people. An empirical study of this nature could therefore help minimize the undue influence of anxiety on undergraduate students' academic activities in the area and consequently improve academic adjustment. Existing empirical evidence also supports the relationship between anxiety and academic adjustment. However, this study

attempts to ascertain the extent of this relationship, and what should be done to improve undergraduate students' academic adjustment level.

Life in the university campus presents lots of challenges to students. These students are leaving the nest, and may not be quite ready to make their own way. Finding themselves in a totally new environment, students can often feel overwhelmed. The first few weeks on campus can be a lonely experience, as the reality of separation from home and family sinks in. This phenomenon is called homesickness, and is a normal transitory reaction when someone is in a new place, and without familiar surroundings, family and friends. It can be a terrible feeling of sadness, grief, longing, and sometimes self-doubt. Not every student who leaves "home" experiences it, but most have this emotional experience at some point in their school lives.

University is not an extension of secondary school. In the university, students are seriously challenged to make the journey from dependence to independence and develop more mature relationships with other students from diverse background as well as adjust to the academic environment which can be a herculean task. The university campus is a regulated and challenging academic environment where the desire to achieve academic goals is paramount to every student. Since ways to achieving these goals do not always come easy, some students also have difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of university. It is also possible that some students may display frustration due to inability to attain their stated goals, dissatisfaction in studying a course perceived to be foisted on them, gloomy looks due to lack of wherewithal to cater for their basic needs on campus. These and many other associated problems can stir up anxiety in undergraduate students. Anxiety can be productive or counterproductive in learning depending on its intensity or level. Although some researchers in Nigeria may have been investigating issues of test anxiety but none appears to have substantially focused on the link between test anxiety level and academic adjustment among undergraduate students.

Also, given the inconsistencies in research findings and dearth of literature on how anxiety level predicts academic adjustment, the pertinent question to ask is will the level of students with good relationship with their environments and others be successfully enhanced or marred by their level of anxiety?

The general purpose of this study is to ascertain the correlation between anxiety level and academic adjustment among undergraduate students. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. extent anxiety level predicts academic adjustment among undergraduate students.

2. extent anxiety level predicts academic adjustment among undergraduate students based on gender.

The study is limited to the extent anxiety level predicts academic adjustment among undergraduates of federal and state universities in Anambra and Enugu States. The study covered three selected faculties namely: Education, Engineering and sciences. The content of this study covered high, moderate and low levels of anxiety of undergraduate students as predictors of academic self - efficacy belief in South-East, Nigeria.

1. To what extent does anxiety level predict academic adjustment among undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria?
2. To what extent does anxiety level predict academic adjustment of male and female undergraduate students?

Anxiety level will not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduate students.

Anxiety level will not significantly predict academic adjustment of male and female undergraduate students.

Method

Correlational research design was used by the researcher. The population of the study was all the undergraduate students of faculties of Education, Engineering and Sciences in South-East Nigeria. The sample for the study consists of 709 undergraduate students comprising of 392 males and 317 females. The sample size was determined using 5% of the total population in line with Ali (2006) submission. Ali recommended that when a population is large, the sample of the study should be between the ranges of 5-20%. A multi stage sampling technique was used for the study. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select three faculties from the selected universities. At the second stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 and 400 level students from the selected faculties. At the third stage, proportionate sampling technique was used to select the students from each faculty and levels of study. The reason for using this technique was to ensure that the 100 and 400 level students in the selected faculties and universities are equally represented. Finally, simple random sampling technique was used to select 709 students. The reason for using this technique is to give every undergraduate in the selected level and faculty equal opportunity of participating in the study.

Two instruments were used for data collection. These were Students' Anxiety Level Questionnaire (SALQ) containing 20 items which was developed with a guide from Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (1971) and Hamilton Anxiety Rating scale (Hamilton, 1959). Also, Student's Academic Adjustment Strategy Questionnaire (SAASQ) containing 20 items to assess students' adjustment mechanisms and levels. The instrument was developed with a guide from Adjustment to college scale (Ali, 2006) and the college adjustment test (Pennebaker, 2013). Both instruments were structured using the 4 - point scale (i.e., A= Always; O=Often; S=Sometimes; N= Never) to measure the extent at which the respondents will agree or disagree with a statement. Each response was scored as thus; Always = 4; Often =3; Sometimes =2; Never =1.

The instruments were face- validated by two experts in Educational Psychology and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation from the faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The validated instruments were thereafter trial- tested on undergraduate students of Delta state University, Abraka. The scores of students were collated and analyzed for internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. The following reliability co-efficient were obtained: 0.81 alpha, and 0.88 alpha for anxiety level and academic adjustment respectively. These were considered high enough to consider the instrument reliable to be used for the study. Seven hundred and nine copies of the instruments were administered to the respondents which were completed and used for data analyses. The data were analyzed using Mean scores, Standard Deviation and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis. To ascertain the extent to which one variable predicts the other, the researchers adopted the following real limit of numbers based on the correlation coefficient: 0.80 and above (high extent), 0.60-0.79 (moderate extent), 0.40-0.59 (low extent), 0.00-0.39 (very low extent). The null hypotheses were tested using linear regression at 0.05 probability level.

Results

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	n	r	R^2
Anxiety Level	2.11	0.13	709	0.78	0.61
Academic Adjustment	2.95	0.16			

R^2 = coefficient of determination

The result shows that the correlation coefficient obtained between anxiety level and academic adjustment was .78. This means that, there exists a positive relationship between anxiety level and academic adjustment. Data in table 4 also show that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of .78 was .61. This coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 61% of students' anxiety level predicts students' academic adjustment. In other words, 61% of students' academic adjustment is accounted for by their anxiety level.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2.510	1	2.510	231.101	0.00
Residual	1.618	149	.011		
Total	4.128	150			

$\alpha = 0.05$

In order to test hypothesis 1 (H_{O1}), Linear regression analysis was used. The data in Table 2 shows that an F-ratio of 231.10 with associated exact probability value of .00 was obtained. The null hypothesis which stated that anxiety level will not significantly predict academic self-efficacy belief among undergraduate students is therefore rejected. Inference drawn was that, anxiety level significantly predicts academic adjustment among undergraduate students. In other words, anxiety level is a significant predictor of academic adjustment of undergraduate students.

Table 3: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment of Male Students

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	r	R^2
Anxiety Level	2.12	0.19	709	0.73	0.54
Academic Adjustment of Male	2.93	0.12			

R^2 = coefficient of determination

The result shows that the correlation coefficient obtained between anxiety level of male students and academic adjustment was .73. This means that, there exist a positive relationship between anxiety level of male students

and their academic adjustment. Table 3 also shows that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of .73 was .54. This coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 54% of students' anxiety level predicts male students' academic adjustment. In other words, 54% of male students' academic adjustment is accounted for by their anxiety level.

Table 4: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment of Female Students

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	n	r	R^2
Anxiety Level	2.13	0.19	709	0.41	0.16
Academic Adjustment of Female	2.96	0.13			

R^2 = coefficient of determination

The result shows that the correlation coefficient obtained between anxiety level of female students and academic adjustment was .41. This means that, there exist a positive relationship between anxiety level of female students and their academic adjustment. Table 4 also shows that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of .41 was .16. This coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 16% of students' anxiety level predicts female students' academic adjustment. In other words, 16% of female students' academic adjustment is accounted for by their anxiety level.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment of Male Students.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.585	1	0.585	78.11	0.00
Residual	0.502	67	0.007		
Total	1.087	68			

$\alpha = 0.05$

In order to test hypothesis 2 (H_{O2}), Linear regression analysis was used. The result in Table 5 shows that an F-ratio of 78.11 with associated exact probability value of .00 was obtained. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Inference drawn was that, anxiety level significantly predicts academic adjustment of male undergraduate students. In other words, anxiety

level is a significant predictor of academic adjustment of male undergraduate students.

Table 6: Regression Analysis of Anxiety Level and Academic Adjustment of Female Students.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.491	1	0.491	15.70	0.00
Residual	2.502	80	0.031		
Total	2.993	81			

$\alpha = 0.05$

In order to test hypothesis 2 (H_{O2}) with reference to female students, Linear regression analysis was used. The result in Table 6 shows that an F-ratio of 15.70 with associated exact probability value of .00 was obtained. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Inference drawn was that, anxiety level significantly predicts academic adjustment of female undergraduate students. In other words, anxiety level is a significant predictor of academic adjustment of female undergraduate students. The result therefore showed that anxiety level significantly predicts academic adjustment among male and female undergraduate students.

Discussion

The study found out that there exist a direct positive relationship between anxiety level and academic adjustment but the relationship was moderate. Hence, there was a statically significant relationship between undergraduate student anxiety level and their academic adjustment. This finding suggests that students' academic adjustment is accounted for by their anxiety level. This findings lend credence to earlier findings of Hsieh, P., Sullivan, J.R., Sass, D. A., & Guerra, N. S, (2012).who observed that anxiety emerged as a significant predictor of academic adjustment in high achievers and insignificant predictor in low achievers. The results revealed that students who had overloaded anxiety engaged in healthy habits and resultantly greater motivation for studies that brought high scores among the high achievers and vice versa with low achievers.

The study further revealed that there exist a direct but moderate positive relationship between male students' anxiety level and their academic adjustment also; there exist a direct but moderate positive relationship between female students' anxiety level and their academic adjustment. Inference drawn was that, anxiety level significantly predicts academic adjustment of male and female undergraduate students. In other words, anxiety level is a significant

predictor of male and female students' academic adjustment. However, female students' have higher anxiety level in relation to their academic adjustment. These findings are consistent with Abdel-Khalek & Alansari (2004) who asserted that females had higher mean anxiety scores than did their male counterparts. The reason that could be adduced to these findings according to Kring and Gordon, (1998) is that women are more verbally and non-verbally expressive of anxiety than are men; women express their fearful feelings with more intensity, more frequent facial expressions of fear and more crying and freezing when afraid.

Conclusion

Based on the outcome of this study, it was concluded that students' adjustment is accounted for by their level of anxiety. Also, anxiety level is a significant predictor of male and female students' academic adjustment. However, female students exhibit higher level of anxiety in their academic adjustment than their male counterparts in South East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the significant link between anxiety level and academic adjustment as established in this study, it is highly recommended that:

- Educators and psychologists should intensify efforts to assess the prevailing levels of academic adjustment among undergraduate students. If lower levels are identified, then appropriate measure should be taken to help raise undergraduate students' academic adjustment levels.
- In order to help increase students' academic adjustment, psychological counselling services should be provided for all undergraduate students. This is essential in that psychological counselling services can help undergraduate students develop harmonious relationship with their academic environment and with the significant others.
- It was recommended among others, that educators and psychologists should give continuous advice and develop techniques that will help lower anxiety level and consequently boost academic adjustment among undergraduate students.

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