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Academic level and student's faculty as factors of test anxiety among undergraduates in Nigeria

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Abstract

Test anxiety as a prominent problem among students has been a focus of study for decades now, with studies focusing more on such factors as age, gender and study habit in relation to test anxiety. There is a dearth of literature in respect of such factors as academic level and student's faculty in relation to test anxiety among undergraduates. The focus of the present study therefore, was to investigate academic level and students' faculty as factors predicting test anxiety among undergraduates in Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique, a total of 197(126 males and 71 females) undergraduates participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 16 to 30years (M=21.6, SD=2.68). Four hypotheses were tested with Pearson Product moment correlation and Multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that academic level and students' faculty had no correlation with test anxiety. Moreover, the result of the multiple regression analysis showed that academic level and students' faculty have no independent and joint influence on test anxiety. It was concluded that irrespective of student's academic level and faculty, test anxiety is unavoidable. Other factors might be responsible for student test anxiety especially among undergraduates Nigeria. It is therefore recommend that more research should be conducted in this area so as to determine the salient factors that predict test anxiety.

Keywords: Academic level, Students' faculty, Tests anxiety, Undergraduate, University students

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1. Introduction

All over the world and at all levels of academic pursuit, academic examinations and tests are inevitable and unavoidable for any student who desires to progress in his studies. Observation of events in the most recent times has shown that, the rate of poor academic performance of many university students is alarming. This is not to say that all the students involved are dull or mentally unfit for study, however, it may be due to one major problem known as “test anxiety” which has made many of them to perform below expectation in their various tests and examinations irrespective of their levels and faculties.

Test anxiety is an experience which expresses itself in a candidate’s mind and behaviour in form of fear of failure, negative self-evaluation which might be related to previously established standard (by self or other institutions), self-blame for perceived shortcomings, social evaluation in relation to student’s estimate of how others are doing and negative prediction of what would be the outcome of a test (Olatoye, 2009). It is characterized by feeling of tension and fear, increased physiological arousal, perceptions of danger and risk, decreased cognitive and behavioral performance, and/or avoidance and escape (Oludipe, 2009). In a nutshell, test anxiety has to do with the feeling of uneasiness or apprehension that a student experiences before, during or after a test because of worry or fear of failure.

Some of the behavioral manifestations of test anxiety among students includes (but not limited to) the followings: feelings of wanting to cry; leaving the test-taking room in order not take the test; feeling of anger or helpless and shaky hands. If these experience persists, it can constitute a serious problem that can affect academic performance of the individuals involved, hence the need to pay attention to it. It is upon this premise that the present study investigated the influence of academic level and students’ faculty on test anxiety behaviour among undergraduates in one university in Nigeria.

2. Literature review

Several studies conducted on test anxiety have identified various factors such as gender (Zaheri et al., 2012), age (Healy, 2009), study habits (Ergene, 2011), and course load (Sansgiry and Kavita Sail, 2006) as major factors influencing test anxiety among undergraduates. Less research has examined factors like academic level and students’ faculty as predictors of undergraduates’ test anxiety. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the influence of academic level and course of study on test anxiety among undergraduates in a university in Nigeria.

Available foreign literature has shown that lower grade students exhibited higher level of test anxiety than higher grade students (Nasser, 1975), the same finding was corroborated by Ferdous (2012); Yousefi Mansor et al. (2009); Guress et al. (2010), who reported that student’s academic level impacted their test anxiety level also. Sansgiry and Kavita Sail’s (2006) who worked on test anxiety among pharmaceutical undergraduates at the University of Houston (Texas) reported that second year students manifested a higher level of test anxiety compared to students in other didactic levels.

Most studies conducted on students' faculty and test anxiety among undergraduates found out that science student, especially those whose course of study falls among health care profession display a high level of test anxiety when compared with their counterparts. E.g. Henning, Sydney, and Shaw (1998) reported that pharmacy students were more prone to test anxiety than the other groups. In another study, within another cultural context, Waterworth (2003) reported that students in nursing department exhibited high level of test anxiety than those in the other departments that are not in the medical line. Based on the above review, the following hypotheses were raised for testing.

- 1) There will be a significant positive relationship among students' academic level, students' faculty and their level of test anxiety
- 2) Academic level will have a significant influence on test anxiety
- 3) Students' faculty will have a significant influence on test anxiety among undergraduates.
- 4) Academic level and students' faculty will have significant joint influence on test anxiety among undergraduates.

3. Method

3.1. Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The independent variables are academic level and students' faculty, while the dependent variable is test anxiety.

3.2. Participants

A total of 197 undergraduates were systematically randomly selected for participation in the study: 126 (64%) males and 71(36%) females with ages ranging from 16 to 30years ($M=21.6$, $SD=2.68$). 24 (12.2%) of the participants were in the Faculty of Arts; 26 (13.2%) in the Faculty Education; 41 (20.8%) were in the Faculty of Science, while 106 (53.8%) were in the Faculty of Social and Management sciences. With regards to their academic level, 93 (47.4%) were in 100level, 41 (20.8%) were in 200level, 25 (13.2%) were in 300level while, 38(19.3%) were in 400level. 177 (89.8%) of the participants were Christians,19(9.6%) were Muslims, while 1(0.5%) were traditionalist.

3.3. Instrument

A validated scale which was divided into two sections was used for data collection. Section A covers the demographic variables, while Section B was the Suinn Test Anxiety Behavior Scale (STABS) (Suinn, 1979). The STABS was a 20-item likert format scale with responses ranging from 'Not at all' (1) to 'very much' (5). A Cronbach alpha of .86 was obtained for this study. Mean score and above indicates high level of test anxiety, while a score below the mean indicates a low level of test anxiety.

3.4. Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the students after a good rapport and the purpose of the research had been explained to them by the researchers. Participation was voluntary. Only consenting participants participated in the study. Other research ethics regarding research with human sample were considered in the study. Questionnaires were administered to participants during school hours in their various classes and collected back the same day. The collection of data lasted for a period of two weeks. Out of the 220 questionnaires administered, 197 were valid and found usable for analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data thus collected was analyzed with the use of SPSS-19.0 Pearson moment correlation statistics was used to analyze Hypothesis 1. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test hypotheses 2, 3 & 4.

4. Results

Table 1. Correlation Matrix showing the relationships among the study variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Students' faculty	1		
2. Academic Level	-0.043	1	
3. Test Anxiety	0.071	-0.124	1

The results in Table 1 shows that students' faculty and academic level did not have a significant relationship with test anxiety [$r(196)=0.71$, $p>0.05$]; [$r(196)=-.124$, $p>0.05$] respectively. This implies that students' level test anxiety is not as a result of their academic levels or their faculty. Based on the above result, hypothesis I which states that there will be significant positive relationships among students' academic level, students' faculty and their level of test anxiety was rejected.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis showing the influence of Academic Level and Students' Faculty on Test Anxiety

Independent Variables	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	P
Academic level		-1.7	>.05	0.14	0.02	1.88(df=2,193)	>.05
Students' faculty		0.88	>.05				

Table 2 result shows that academic level and students' faculty are not significant predictor of test anxiety among undergraduates in Nigeria. As presented in the result, there was no significant joint influence of academic level and students' faculty on test anxiety among students [$F(2,193) = 1.88, p > .05$]. The R value of 0.14 shows a positive relationship between the independent variables and test anxiety among students. Also, the R^2 value shows that the independent variables jointly contributed 2% to test anxiety among students. However, the independent influence of the predictor variables shows that academic level and students' faculty independently and significantly did not influence student test anxiety ($\beta = -0.12, t = -1.70, p > .05$ & $\beta = 0.06, t = 0.88, p > .05$) respectively. The above result did not confirm hypotheses 2, 3 and 4. This implies that other variables apart from students' academic level and faculty are responsible for precipitating test anxiety among students.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study were in dissonance findings of other researchers in this respect. Result showed that students' test anxiety has no significant relationship with his/her level and faculty. This means that irrespective of student's level, that is, either the student is in 100L, 200L, 300L, 400L, or 500L did not increase or decrease his/her apprehension level towards test anxiety.

The possible explanation for this result is the fact that students (participants) used in this study displayed a similar attitude irrespective of their academic levels and faculties towards test anxiety. Similar attitude in the fact that what seems to be evoke among students of nowadays is this issue of "facebook, watching of football, especially by the boys, ping-pong" and the likes has made almost all the students not to adequately prepare for a test or exam. Moreover, since this attitude is not restricted to any particular academic level, it therefore forms a current trend among the students. As a result of this attitude, they have less time for their study and thereby wait for the die minute before studying for their test. When this happens, it is expected that they are likely to experience some kind of test anxiety.

From the result of this study, it can thus be infer that test anxiety has nothing to do with a student's academic level and faculty. Although previous studies conducted in this area submitted that students in 100L or first year were more prone to test anxiety than the other levels (Nasseri, 1975; Ferdous, 2012; Yousefi et al., 2009; Guress et al., 2010)

There was no much literature on students' faculty and test anxiety. However, the study conducted by Henning et al. (1998) and Waterworth (2003) indicated that science students displayed a higher level of test anxiety when compared with students from other faculties. But this is not the case of the present study. Findings from the present study revealed that test anxiety is bound to occur irrespective of students' faculty. The present study's result can be explain based on fact that, there is no policy put in place by any of the faculties to guide the students on how to prepare well for their test and also counsel them on the adverse effect of test anxiety on their academic performance.

6. Conclusion

In this study, academic level and students faculty do not have significant influence on test anxiety, therefore it is concluded that other factors apart from the variables examined in the study can be responsible for test anxiety among students. We therefore, recommend that future research should be conducted in this area in order to determine the factors predicting test anxiety.

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