

Primary School Pupils' Test Anxiety and their Academic Achievement in English Language in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated primary school pupils test anxiety and their academic performance in Calabar municipality of Cross River State. To achieve this aim, two research questions were raised and hypotheses formulated in relation to the variables indentified for the study. These variables of test anxiety were, fear of failure by pupils and lack of preparation. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1,242 primary six pupils. A total of 150 Pupils formed the sample of the study. Data for the analysis was elicited through a questionnaire titled Pupils Test Anxiety Questionnaire (PTAQ) and a 20 item English Achievement Test (EAT). Hypotheses were tested statistically using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (PPMCA). The result indicated a significant relationship between fear of failure by pupil, lack of preparation and their academic achievement in English language. Based on the findings it was recommended that pupils should be encouraged to put in more effort in preparation for any examination. This would build up their confidence in writing the examination thereby bringing about enhanced academic performance. There should be a cordial relationship between the teacher and the pupils in order to take away any form of fear or tension that could arise before or during any examination or test.

Keywords: Test, Anxiety, academic achievement, primary school pupils, English Language.

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic human factors which contribute to the outcome of academic performance of pupils is anxiety. However, when taken to the extreme, it may produce unwarranted results. One of the most threatening events that cause anxiety in pupils is test or examination. When pupils develop extreme fear of performing poorly in any examination, they experience test anxiety.

Anxiety according to Hornby Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary (2010) refers to; an unpleasant state of mental uneasiness, nervousness, apprehension and obsession or concern about some uncertain event. Anxiety is a predictor of academic performance and it has both a facilitating and a detrimental effect to academic achievement. It is a general term for several disorders that causes nervousness, fear, excitement, apprehension and worry. This disorder can affect how people feel and behave especially when it relates to any examination condition. Also,

Spielberger and Vagg (1995) defined test anxiety as the tendency to appraise examination and other assessment situation as threatening.

According to Dobson and Markham (2001), various areas of cognition are also negatively influenced by test anxiety. For example, worrying is said to use some of the cognition processing resources such as attention, awareness and working memory that could be applied toward the testing situation.

In relation to academic performance of pupils, anxiety faced by pupils comes mostly when they are about to take a test or an examination. As earlier stated, test anxiety is a major factor that contributes to the nervous negative outcomes including academic under achievements as well as failure. Many primary school pupils may have the cognitive ability to do well during test or examination but may not do so as a result of higher level of anxiety in them. Brown (2002) added that this situation is sometimes caused by poor preparation by the pupils before the examination, lack of confidence, the teaching method and lack of facilities for effective teaching.

However, this study is aimed at looking at just two factors which include; fear of failure by pupils, and lack of preparation by pupils. Also, Cassady & Johnson (2002) added that worrying and emotionality are commonly assumed to lead to learning deficit. These learning deficits according to the authors often show up in testing situations. Rana and Mahmood (2010) affirmed this when they carried out a study on the relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement and found out that a significant negative relationship exist between test anxiety score and students achievement scores. This according to them means that cognitive factor (worrying) contribute more in test anxiety than affective (emotional) factors.

Meiser (1996) affirmed that as the demands of a testing situation increasing, so does the anxiety. In the same vein, Olatoye (2009) in a study on students' test anxiety, motivation for examination and Science achievement indicated that anxiety is an emotional component of human beings that manifest itself in life endeavours in form of worrying and restlessness. When this kind of emotional component manifest with regards to a test or assessment condition, then test anxiety occurs. The author further stated that test anxiety is an experience which expresses itself in a candidates mind and behaviour in form of fear of failure(which is one of the variables of the present study), negative self evaluation, self blame for perceived short coming and so on. This according to Denscombe (2000) reflect a tendency for people to trivialize the stress and anxiety experienced by children and young people over test, examination and other forms of assessment as well as to regard their experiences as somehow less meaningful than those of adult.

In a study carried out by Oludipe (2009) in order to find out how test anxiety can affect students' performance level in Physics, found out that students whose test anxiety is low perform better than students who have high test anxiety on numerical and non-numerical task in the subject. A little anxiety according to Dawood, Ghadeer, Mitsu, Almutary and Alenezi (2016) is required as it will help student to get motivated and learn. But on the other hand, Coon and Mitterer (2009) said that to mount up so much anxiety will not help the student to perform; rather it will negatively influence the academic performance of the students. Also, Hancock (2001) in a study on the effect of students test anxiety and teacher's evaluation practices on students' achievement and motivation at the post secondary level. In the statistical analysis of the study, the author found significant result, which revealed that all students especially student with high anxiety level, perform poorly and were less motivated to learn or study than students with low anxiety level. By implication, this could be as a result of lack of preparation or fear of failure by the pupils.

Mahmood and Akram (2010) reported a study conducted by Nicholson (2009) who investigated the effect of test anxiety and achievement of grade II students. The study revealed a relationship between anxiety and achievement. This means that there is a great impact on the achievement of pupils who show a great level of anxiety during test.

Test anxiety can also arise as a result of lack of confidence in the pupils. Cornelius-ukpepi (2010) stated that a child who lacks confidence in himself can be confused and frustrated. This can determine the success or failure of such a pupil in any test or examination.

In other words, the fear of failure can determine whether a pupil will perform well or not. As a pupils or an individual, it is expected that one should have some shame or be remorseful when he or she fails any examination or test. Using this guilt feeling as a guide according to Cornelius-ukpepi (2010) will help the pupil to take his studies seriously thereby overcoming the problem of anxiety.

It is against this background that this study investigated primary school pupils' test anxiety and their academic achievement in English language in Calabar municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of primary school pupils' test anxiety and their academic achievement in English language in Calabar municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine if:

- Fear of failure by pupil influence their academic performance in English language.
- Lack of preparation influence pupils' academic performance in English language.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- How does fear of failure by pupils influence their academic performance in English language?
- What is the influence of lack of preparation on pupils' academic performance in English language?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- There is no significant influence of fear of failure by pupils and their academic performance in English language.
- There is no significant influence of lack of preparation on pupils academic performance in English language.

METHODOLOGY

The study was aimed at investigating primary school pupils test anxiety and their academic performance in Calabar municipality of Cross River State. The area of the study has 21 Primary Schools. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. The justification for the use of this research design is because the variables under study cannot be manipulated as their manifestations have already occurred. Stratified random sampling technique was also used for the study. Data for the analysis was elicited through a questionnaire titled Pupils Test Anxiety Questionnaire (PTAQ) and a 20 item English Achievement Test (EAT) Hypotheses were tested statistically using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (PPMCA).

Population

The population of the study consists of all the Public Primary 6 pupils offering English Language in the local government where the study was carried out. Using available figure obtained from the Universal Basic Education Board as at 2014/2015 academic session, 1,252 primary six pupils formed the population of the study.

Sampling Technique

In order to carry out the study, stratified Random Sampling Technique was adopted.

Sample

A total of 150 Pupils formed the sample for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected using the questionnaire and English language performance test items were coded and analyzed and tested at .05 level of significance. The result is presented thus.

Hypothesis One

The first hypotheses stated that there is no significant relationship between fear of failure by pupils and their academic performance in English language. To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis technique was employed. The result is presented in the table 1.

Table1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (PPMCA) of the relationship between fear of failure by pupils and their academic performance in English Language (N150)

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum y$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Fear of failure	2870	57566	140437	0.205
Performance in English Language	7239	382671		

Significant at 0.05, critical value = 0.159, df=148

The result of the analysis as shown in table 1 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.205 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.150. This value was tested at .05 level of significance with degree of freedom of 148. This by implication means that the null hypothesis stated is rejected and the alternate hypotheses upheld. This means that fear has significant relationship with pupils' academic performance in English language. In other words, when pupils are anxious of test or any examination it brings about fear which can determine the success or failure of the test.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between lack of preparation and pupils' academic performance in English language. In order to test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis (PPMCA) of the relationship between lack of preparation by pupils and their academic performance in English language (N150)

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum y$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Lack of preparation	2631	47613		
Performance in English Language	7239	382671	128476	0.215

Significant at 0.05, critical value = 0.159, df=148

The result of this analysis in table 2 showed that the calculated r-value of 0.215 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.159 at 0.05 level of significance with the degree of freedom of 148. The null hypothesis earlier stated is therefore rejected and the alternate retained. This means that there is a high level of relationship between lack of preparation by pupils in terms of test anxiety and English. That is, when pupils do not prepare for a test, there is a likely hood that their performance will be negatively affected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the first hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between fear of failure and their academic achievement in English language. This result by implication means that when fear of failure is excessive; it can produce high level of anxiety that could interfere with relevant information affecting the cognitive ability of the pupils. The finding is in agreement with the position of Wilding and Andrew (2004) who said that fear has a direct correlation with anxiety as it reduces the academic performance and increase the overall student drop-out rate. In other words, pupils who are so afraid of failing an examination or assignment may be due to the fear of failure itself and not the difficulty of the task which is involved that prevents the pupils from achieving their academic goal. Also, the finding of the study is in line with Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) (2006) which affirmed that, while the pressure to perform can act as a motivator, it can also be devastating to individuals who tie their self-worth to the outcome of a test.

In other words, if a pupil feels that he or she is not smart, that does not know the information well enough, such a pupil is not capable of performing well in an examination or test and the expectation of the pupil will be that of failure. This means that negative expectation or

fear of failure can create anxiety. This can disable or prevent a child from doing well in a test or examination.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between lack of preparation of pupils and their academic achievement in English language. This finding supports the finding of Sarasm (1998) who found out that students who experience test anxiety are usually unprepared for the test and as such are easily distracted during the test and they do experience deficiency in comprehending relative simple instruction which affect their performance in the test. Also, the finding of this study is in line with Putwain and Symes (2011) who found out that students performances worsen when they are not prepared and experience more test anxiety and also tend to look more worrisome than when they are prepared. The authors also added that fear appeals are casually related to test anxiety and examination/test scores, and they may indeed reduce examination or test scores through test anxiety.

CONCLUSION

One of the reasons for high level of test anxiety as revealed in the study is because of fear of failure and lack of preparation. This anxiety largely influences pupils' performance. Pupil may be more likely to persist in their academic activities and put in more if they prepare very well for the examination or test. Also the problem of fear of failure may arise not because the test is difficult for the pupil but could be as a result of emotional or psychological issue. In conclusion therefore, it is important for pupils to know that a very simple way of reducing fear of failure is to put in more effort to feel better prepared for any test.

Recommendations

Based on the findings it was recommended that:

- There should be a cordial relationship between the teacher and the pupils in order to take away any form of fear or tension that could arise before during or after any examination or test.
- Pupils should be encouraged to put in more effort in preparation for any examination. This would build up their confidence in writing the exams thereby bringing about enhanced academic performance.

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