

EXAMINATION DISHONESTY IN ACADEMIA: DOES GRAPHOPHOBIA MATTER?

Anthony Iruoghene Kenneth

**Department of Language Studies, Federal College of Education (Technical) Isu, Ebonyi State, Nigeria*

Abstract

Exams are a standard component of the educational system in every society across the globe. On the other hand, there has been a growing pattern of unethical behavior during examinations, which has harmed the evaluation of students in academic institutions. Earlier studies have shed light on the patterns and correlations of exam cheating in the educational sector. However, there is a paucity of information regarding the influence of the emotional state in relation to writing on exam cheating. The current paper examined the correlation between writing apprehension and examination malpractice. One hundred and eighty-seven ($n=187$) undergraduates enrolled in a public higher institution in Ebonyi State participated in the study. The respondents completed self-report measures of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) and Academic Dishonesty Scale. The study adopted a correlational research model for data analysis. The result demonstrated a significant positive correlation between writing anxiety and examination malpractice in undergraduates, $r(185) = .31, p < .001$, with writing concern contributing about 21% of the variation in examination malpractice. The study concludes that graphophobia significantly determines cheating in higher education.

Keywords: writing apprehension, examination malpractice, higher education, students

Introduction

The examination is an essential component of the educational system in all societies. It is the primary instrument for evaluating students' knowledge and reflects the primary avenue for assessing the quality and quantity of knowledge accumulated after a teaching process (Egbue & Mathias, 2013). Exams are valuable indicators of how far a student has come in achieving the goals set for them (Rasul & Bukhsh, 2011). The examination not only provides the instructor with feedback to help them determine the level of knowledge acquisition, but it also helps them determine the level of knowledge retention exhibited by the students (Onyibe et al., 2015). On the other hand, there has been a widespread concern regarding the rising incidence of irregularities in standardized tests administered at all educational levels, including universities (Ruto et al., 2011). The term "examination malpractice" refers to unethical behavior in the academic community regarding the evaluation and application of knowledge. It reflects academic conduct inconsistent with the institution's standards regarding assessments and other institutional goals (Bayaa et al., 2016). It is not uncommon for students to exhibit this phenomenon in their pursuit of obtaining unwarranted benefits in examinations (Guthrie, 2009). Therefore, researchers have referred to the trend as dishonest and fraudulent intellectual larceny, which is detrimental to the institutional

reputation of any society as well as the educational advancement of that society (Maina et al., 2014).

In an educational setting, examination malpractice is defined as providing or receiving information from other individuals through illegal materials and evading the approved assessment process (Faucher & Caves, 2009). Previous studies have shed light on the prevalence of unethical testing practices within the Nigerian education system (Omemu, 2015; Udim et al., 2018). Some unethical practices used during examinations in Nigeria included conspiracies, impersonations, giraffes, inscriptions, scientific misconduct, and bribery. Most importantly, unethical behavior in the academic world reflects the complex interaction of various factors, including situational, contextual, and personal (Fields, 2003). For example, research has linked the amount of study done and sex (Ampuni et al., 2020), self-control and sensation seeking (Portnoy et al., 2019), time scarcity, and the pressure to get a good grade (Bachore, 2016). Additionally, it was emphasized (Chaminuka & Ndudzo, 2014) that students are driven to cheat on tests because they are afraid of failing and have not adequately prepared for examinations. There is a shortage of learning and teaching resources. On the other hand, there is a lack of information regarding examination malpractice and writing anxiety.

Writing is an essential part of English communication and has received much attention recently. Compared to reading, listening, and speaking, it is a skill developed gradually over time (Albertson & Billingsley, 2000; Olinghouse & Santangelo, 2017). Writing abilities 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 concrete (Harlena et al., 2019). It is a fundamental ability in English language acquisition (Ariyanti, 2016), requiring the integration of basic grammar rules to generate meaningful expressions. Writing has long been seen as critical in teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) (Bsharat & Behak, 2021). As a result, it is a broad talent that helps to strengthen vocabulary, grammar, thinking, planning, editing, revising, and other aspects. Writing skills require a technical understanding of writing norms, style guidelines, and formatting for various scenarios.

Several researchers indicate that many ESL students commonly regard writing skills as a complex task (e.g., Graham, 2019; Graham & Alves, 2021; Kusmaningrum et al., 2019; Kusmawardhani, 2017; Kusumawati et al., 2020; Munira, 2017; Patino et al., 2020; Rao & Durga, 2018; Rosemarie & Mualimin, 2021; Sabti et al., 2019; Sujinnah et al., 2019; Suryaman, 2019). Many components must always be integrated in order to conduct this productive talent. It does, however, denote the road to understanding pupils' learning results. Students may be requested to alter an existing idea by constructing any information from their schemas. As a result, it contributes to students' academic progress and future employment opportunities (Etim, 2019; Naghdipour, 2021).

Nigeria's educational growth has been riddled with difficulties, mainly in written communication (Aina, 2017; Akande & Oyedapo, 2018). Poor writing mechanics, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure are all manifestations of poor writing skills. Low motivation to enhance writing abilities is caused by pupils' lack of vocabulary mastery, word order, and paragraph development. The

problem of weak writing abilities at the postsecondary level is widespread (Perin & Lauterbach, 2018) and is a significant worry in every society's education sector.

English is a compulsory subject at all levels of the Nigerian academic curriculum. Students are exposed to basic English skills from the beginning of their education, with preparatory programs and on to higher school. Writing, in particular, is a fundamental component of teaching and learning. As a result, most undergraduate students find it challenging to fully communicate their knowledge in written form, instilling a wide range of nervous and pessimistic sentiments about writing. As a result, triggering a psychological state of graphophobia. The study aims to investigate the association between graphophobia and examination misconduct.

Graphophobia and examination dishonesty

Graphophobia is the irrational fear of writing. Students suffering from this condition can expect to experience a very high amount of anxiety from merely thinking of writing, let alone doing it. Their anxiety may be so intense that they may even endure a full-blown panic attack. Although such an influx of anxiety will not always be the case for everyone suffering from graphophobia, it is still very plausible to occur nonetheless. However, graphophobia reflects the psychological aspects of the learner's factors, which constrain skills acquisition in various domains relative to learning English as a foreign or second language (Talib & Fook, 2016; Yassin & Razak, 2017). Writing apprehension describes a psychological state that exerts extreme distress and pressure in a writing context.

Accordingly, researchers have stressed the negative impact of writing apprehensions on students' learning motivation (Akbarov & Aydoğan, 2018; Alico, 2016). Notably, the trend encompasses the phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses to writing situations, which are likely to exacerbate during the examination period. Emotional factors, including apprehensions, play a considerable role in influencing ESL writing in various studies. Numerous disparate studies have underscored the adverse effect of writing apprehensions on the learner's writing performance (Cruz, 2021; Daud et al., 2016; Karlina & Hidayyanto, 2018; Kurniasih, 2017; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Rasuan & Wati, 2021; Sadpanah, 2020; Septiani et al., 2021; Shehzadi & Krihinasamy, 2018; Soleimani et al., 2020; Surur & Dengela, 2019; Tsai, Pi-Chen; Cheng, 2009). This investigation has confirmed that writing accomplishment motivation and self-efficacy can significantly improve writing performance. In contrast, writing anxiety can hurt writing ability. (Jawas, 2019). In other words, a student who feels apprehensive when faced with a writing situation may be tempted to avoid situations that could trigger such apprehension. In other words, writing apprehensions potentiates the experience of a heightened level of worry, fear, and extreme concern about examination. Thus, those students who cannot write correctly are more likely to adopt malpractice to pass exams than those who can communicate effectively in writing.

Hypothesis: *Graphophobia would correlate with examination dishonesty.*

Method

In the study, a correlational research design was used. Undergraduates from postsecondary institutions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, comprised the population. Males and females were conveniently sampled from the state's public and private higher education institutions for the study.

Measure

Writing anxiety was assessed using a modified version of the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) initially developed by (Cheng 2004). The scale is a 22-item questionnaire to assess pupils' English writing abilities. The scale assesses three types of anxieties: physical anxiety (as manifested by negative symptoms like tightness and anxiousness), cognitive anxiety (as exemplified by negative expectations, obsession with performance, worry or dread of unfavorable evaluation), and avoidance behavior (as reflected in avoidance in writing). The scale is graded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). A higher score suggests greater writing anxiety.

The Academic dishonesty scale was used to assess examination malpractice (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). The scale is a 12-item questionnaire used to assess pupils' dishonesty. Respondents are asked to rate how frequently they have engaged in dishonest behaviors on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from never = 1 to many times = 5. Items include "copying from another student without permission" and "assisting someone in cheating on an exam." The scale had a scale of 12 to 60, with a higher score suggesting frequent 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 correlational design was adopted in the present study. Data from the respondents were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences SPSS, version 23, and presented in the table below.

Table 1: shows the correlation between the variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
1. Graphophobia	3.29	0.34	.12**	
2. Exam dishonesty	4.71	0.42	.33	.37**
<i>R</i> ²	.21			

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

The study aimed to understand the relationship between graphophobia and students' participation in exam irregularities. Pearson's product-moment correlation analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between writing anxiety and examination malpractice, $r(185) = .31$, $p = .001$, with writing apprehension explaining 21% of the variation in examination malpractice. Thus, the result supported the hypothesis that writing apprehension correlates significantly with examination malpractice.

Discussion

The current study sought to investigate the relationship between graphophobia and examination dishonesty among undergraduates in Ebonyi State. One hundred eighty-seven participants completed the survey instrument. Pearson's product-moment correlation analyses revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between writing anxiety and exam malpractice, $r(185) = .31, p.001$, with writing apprehensions explaining 21% of the variation in academic dishonesty. As a result, the findings support the hypothesis that the affective state of anxiousness concerning English writing is highly associated with the student's intention to cheat. Writing uneasiness, among other intervening variables in academic dishonesty, positively adds to the expanding cheating behavior in tertiary institutions. The study's findings also suggest that the increasing prevalence of exam malpractices, plagiarism, bribery, and impersonation seen in most institutions of higher learning, including secondary schools, could be attributed partly to apprehensions caused by the inability to communicate in learned materials in writing form effectively. This assumes that students stressed about writing are more likely to succeed by using an immoral method.

According to the findings of this study, the subjective affective emotions that certain students have in response to tests create a conduit for students to participate in dishonest academic behaviors. The study's findings support prior research demonstrating a link between test anxiety and academic dishonesty. (Behroozi et al., 2017; Hammoudi & Benzerroug, 2021; Mih & Mih, 2016; Nwosu et al., 2020; Wenzel & Reinhard, 2020). For instance, the result 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). As a result, information about unethical behavior in academic institutions has been impacted. The current conclusion could be explained by the inability to articulate learning in writing and the fear of failure, which causes anxiety and exacerbates alternative behavior. According to a previous study (Encandela et al., 2014), self-doubt during exam preparation can aggravate writing anxiety and encourage dishonest behavior. The current finding validates writing anxiety as a predictor of academic dishonesty. As a result, the study provides evidence that writing anxiety plays a role in academic cheating behavior.

The implication of the study

This study found that graphophobia in students could be an excellent road to academic dishonesty. This could have an impact on learning outcomes and compromise academic integrity in today's educational system. Indeed, the outcome has ramifications for intellectual growth and institutional integrity. It gave educators and counselors vital information in handling the exam malpractice threat in Ebonyi State and Nigeria.

Conclusion

The current study examined the link between writing apprehension and examination malpractice in a sample of undergraduates. The results of the data analysis revealed that graphophobia was

positively connected with cheating activity. Indeed, the study finds a correlation between writing apprehension and cheating in higher education in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. As a result, the study's hypothesis is supported. The findings add to the literature by identifying writing uneasiness as a psychological worry that may induce cheating in academic activities such as exams, presentations, and debates. However, there are certain limitations to the study. For example, the study was unable to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Researchers in the future should use an experimental approach. Furthermore, the self-reported measurements may allow for biased reporting. As a result, different data collection methods may reduce the occurrence of incorrect information. However, the study proposes that language educators use a comprehensive strategy that exposes students to persistent writing. Online writing tools, such as PBworks, have significantly improved writing skills. As a result, educators are encouraged to take advantage of technology resources to improve their writing.

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