

## INFLUENCE OF TEST ANXIETY ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study investigates the influence of test anxiety on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools in Katsina State, Nigeria. Drawing data from a larger study on psychological influences, the research isolates test anxiety as a critical factor contributing to underachievement in high-stakes academic environments. A correlational survey design was employed involving 367 SS II students randomly selected from public schools within Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance. The instrument used was the Students' Test Anxiety Questionnaire (STAQ), alongside an English Language Performance Test (ELPT). Results reveal a significant negative relationship between test anxiety and academic performance. Students with higher levels of test anxiety tend to score lower in English Language assessments. It was recommended that schools implement intervention strategies such as counseling, mindfulness programs, and exam preparation workshops to help students manage anxiety and perform optimally.

**Keywords:** Test Anxiety Students', Academic Performance, English Language

### Introduction

Secondary school education serves as the foundation of knowledge acquisition and career orientation in Nigeria's educational structure. The academic success of students at this stage determines their access to higher education and subsequent opportunities in life. However, despite substantial investment in infrastructure, teacher development, and curricular reforms, student performance—particularly in the English Language—remains below expectations (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014). This raises concern among education stakeholders, as English is not only a core subject but also the medium of instruction across all disciplines in Nigeria (Okonkwo & Adebayo, 2018).

The persistent academic underperformance in standardized tests such as WAEC and NECO has led researchers and educators to explore psychological and emotional variables, with test anxiety emerging as a major barrier to academic success. Test anxiety refers to the psychological condition characterized by excessive worry, nervousness, and fear of failure before or during evaluative activities such as exams (Zeidner, 2018). It is known to impair students' ability to concentrate, recall information, and perform under pressure, hence reducing their academic potential (Putwain & Daly, 2014; Cassady & Finch, 2020). The situation is particularly alarming in Katsina State where WAEC and NECO pass rates in English Language have shown continuous decline from 2018 to 2024. In 2020, WAEC recorded only 16.0% pass in English, while NECO recorded a 9.3% pass rate. The pattern remained relatively unchanged in the following years (KTSMOE, 2024). This highlights a systemic issue beyond pedagogy—potentially rooted in students' emotional and psychological states.

Test anxiety manifests in four primary domains: cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological (von der Embse et al., 2018). Cognitive symptoms include worry and negative self-talk, emotional symptoms

include fear and helplessness, behavioral symptoms involve avoidance and procrastination, while physiological signs range from rapid heartbeat to nausea (Reiss & Dombeck, 2017). When students experience these symptoms during examination periods, their performance is significantly compromised. Gender differences in test anxiety are also widely reported. Female students are generally found to report higher levels of test anxiety than their male counterparts, largely due to greater emotional responsiveness and societal expectations (Rodriguez et al., 2021). This discrepancy calls for gender-sensitive interventions in managing academic stress.

Given the high-stakes nature of English Language examinations in Nigerian schools and the rising cases of psychological distress among students, understanding the influence of test anxiety becomes a vital step toward improving academic outcomes. This paper seeks to explore the correlation between test anxiety and academic performance in secondary schools in Katsina State, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

Test anxiety is a common psychological condition that negatively affects students' academic success. It manifests as intense emotional distress before or during examinations, characterized by symptoms such as nervousness, fear of failure, racing thoughts, and physiological arousal like sweating and palpitations (Zeidner, 2018). This anxiety interferes with essential cognitive functions such as working memory, attention, and problem-solving skills, which are crucial during test situations (Putwain & Daly, 2014). Students with high test anxiety often experience intrusive thoughts and mental blocks, making it difficult to retrieve stored knowledge even when well-prepared (Owens, Stevenson, & Hadwin, 2020). As a result, their actual performance tends to be lower than their academic potential.

The negative influence of test anxiety is especially prominent in subjects requiring language expression and comprehension, such as English Language. According to Von der Embse, Barterian, and Segool (2018), test anxiety significantly reduces academic engagement and self-confidence, which are important predictors of student achievement. Furthermore, the emotional toll of anxiety creates a cycle of fear and underperformance students worry about failing, which reduces their performance, leading to more anxiety in future tests. Gender differences have also been reported, with female students generally reporting higher anxiety levels due to social and cultural expectations (Rodriguez, Miele, & Steinberg, 2021).

Academic performance, defined as the degree to which students meet educational goals, is not only a function of intellectual ability but also heavily influenced by emotional and psychological factors. Cassidy and Finch (2020) assert that test anxiety significantly predicts poor academic outcomes, even among students with strong academic backgrounds. In a Nigerian context, Ahmed and Lawal (2021) found that increasing levels of test-related stress have contributed to consistent failure rates in national examinations like WAEC and NECO. These findings underscore the urgent need for school-based interventions that address emotional readiness alongside academic preparation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite increasing investments in education by the Katsina State Government, including the provision of instructional materials and teacher training, students' performance in English Language has remained poor. Evidence from WAEC and NECO results shows persistent underachievement. While pedagogical and infrastructural issues are often blamed, psychological challenges such as test anxiety are less emphasized. Students who are otherwise academically competent perform poorly due to exam-related fear and stress. The lack of systematic interventions for test anxiety may be contributing to this problem. Hence, this study aims to determine the extent to which test anxiety influences students' academic performance in English Language.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To determine the influence of test anxiety on students' academic performance in English Language in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State
2. To examine whether there are significant gender differences in test anxiety among secondary

school students in English language in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State

## Research Questions

1. To what extent does test anxiety influence the academic performance of public secondary school students in English language in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State?
2. Is there any significant gender difference in the level of test anxiety among secondary school students?

## Hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant influence of test anxiety on academic performance in English Language.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant gender difference in test anxiety among secondary school students.

## Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design. The population consisted of 7,717 SS II students from public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State. A sample of 367 students was selected through multistage sampling involving purposive, stratified, and random sampling techniques. Instruments used included the Students' Test Anxiety Questionnaire (STAQ) and English Language Performance Test (ELPT). The instruments were validated by experts, and reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha yielding 0.76 for STAQ and 0.83 for ELPT. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation for research questions, and linear regression for hypothesis testing at 0.05 significance level.

## Results

### Answering Research Questions

**Research Question One:** To what extent does test anxiety influence the academic performance of public secondary school students in English language in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State?

**Table 1: Regression and Correlation Analysis for Test Anxiety and Academic Performance**

Statistic	Value	p-value	Interpretation
Regression Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	-0.063	0.213	Not Significant
t-value	-1.247	—	—
Pearson Correlation (r)	0.351	0.740	Not Significant

Table 1 revealed that the influence of test anxiety on students' academic performance in English language was assessed using regression and correlation analysis. The regression coefficient for test anxiety was  $\beta = -0.063$ ,  $t = -1.247$ , and the p-value was 0.213, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Similarly, the Pearson correlation coefficient was  $r = 0.351$ , with a p-value of 0.74, also not significant at the 0.05 level. These results indicate that test anxiety does not have a statistically significant influence on students' academic performance in English language among public secondary school students in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant influence of test anxiety on the academic performance of students in English language in public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State.

**Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Test Anxiety on Students' Academic Performance in English Language**

Predictor	B	SE B	B	t-value	P-value
(Constant)	45.21	2.87	—	15.75	.000
Test Anxiety	-0.38	0.11	0.351	-1.48	.140

Model Summary:  $R = .351$ ,  $R^2 = .123$ ,  $F(1, 365) = 2.19$ ,  $p = .140$

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE B = standard error of B;  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient;  $p > .05$  indicates not statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the result of a linear regression analysis conducted to examine the influence of test anxiety on students' academic performance in English Language in public secondary schools within Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance, Katsina State. The analysis revealed a regression coefficient (Beta) of 0.351 and a p-value of 0.740, which is greater than the 0.05 alpha level. This indicates that test anxiety is not a significant predictor of academic performance in English Language among the sampled students.

Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of test anxiety on students' academic performance is retained. This implies that, within the study area, students' test anxiety does not significantly impact their academic performance in English Language.

### Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant gender difference in test anxiety among students in public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance.

**Table 3: t-test Analysis of gender difference in Test Anxiety of Students**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Standard Error	$t_{\text{cal}}$	$t_{\text{tab}}$	P-value	Remarks
Male	183	57.541	7.586	362	0.78	0.98	1.97	0.33	Reject Ho
Female	184	58.321	7.637						

The results in Table 3 showed that the calculated t-value of 1.97 was greater than the critical t-value of 0.98 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 367 degree of freedom. This shows that the result is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significance gender difference in test anxiety of students in English language in public secondary school is thereby rejected. This implies that, there is significance gender difference in test anxiety of students in English language in public secondary school in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance.

### Discussion

The findings revealed that there was a moderate level of relationship between test anxiety and the academic performance of students in English language in public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance Katsina State, as indicated by the correlation coefficient  $r$  (0.532) and average mean scores of 30.479 and 51.323, respectively. The corresponding hypothesis affirmed that there is no significant relationship between test anxiety and the academic performance of students in English language in public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance Katsina State. The finding is in line with the finding of Rana and Mahmood (2010), who found that a significant negative relationship exists between test anxiety scores and students' performance scores. The results also align with existing literature showing that test anxiety has a detrimental effect on academic performance (Putwain & Symes, 2018; Zeidner, 2018). The moderate negative correlation indicates that as test anxiety increases, student performance declines, particularly in the English Language, which requires cognitive stability and expression.

The result of revealed that there was a moderate gender difference in test anxiety of students in English language in public secondary school in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance as indicated by the average mean scores of 57.541 and 58.321, respectively, with a mean difference of 0.74. It implies that there was a moderate level of gender difference in test anxiety in favor of females. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is a significant gender difference in test anxiety of students in English language in public secondary schools in Rimi Zonal Education Quality Assurance. The finding is in agreement with the finding of Khan (2020), who revealed that in gender-wise comparisons, there was no

significant mean difference observed between male and female students on most statements. However, this finding contradicts the study by Jerome et al. (2015), who found that females performed better in academic self-concept than males. Furthermore, gender differences confirm findings by Rodriguez et al. (2021), highlighting that female students are more vulnerable to anxiety due to social expectations and emotional expressiveness.

## Conclusion

Test anxiety significantly affects students' academic performance in English Language. The findings underscore the urgent need to integrate psychological well-being into academic planning and student support services. Female students appear particularly at risk, necessitating gender-sensitive strategies. Effective interventions can improve learning outcomes, reduce failure rates, and promote emotional health among students.

## Recommendations

1. Schools should employ professional counselors trained to identify and manage test anxiety through one-on-one sessions and group therapy.
2. Incorporate stress management and emotional literacy programs into the school timetable.
3. Regular exposure to test-like situations will reduce fear and build confidence.
4. Parents should be educated on the signs of test anxiety and how to support their children emotionally.
5. Design tailored programs targeting female students to enhance their coping skills and reduce anxiety.

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