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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ANXIETY AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG FINAL YEAR UNDERGRADUATES OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Four purposes, four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlation survey research design. The study was carried out in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, both in Anambra State. A sample of 288 students comprising final year undergraduates were drawn from the population of 1,466 (363 male and 1,103 female) undergraduates through multistage sampling technique. Two instruments were used for this study, namely; Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS), and Paykel Suicide Scale (PSS). The instruments were subjected to face validation by three experts from the department of Educational Foundations. Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimate was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. A coefficient value of 0.86 and 0.86 were obtained for Academic Anxiety Scale, and for Paykel Suicide Scale respectively. Instruments were administered through direct delivery method. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to answer the research questions as well as test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed a high positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates in Anambra State ($r = 0.747$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates was higher among male students ($r = 0.944$) than females ($r = 0.644$). Both urban ($r = 0.546$) and rural-based students ($r = 0.756$) also showed significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour ($p = 0.000$). Younger (<20 years, $r = 0.863$) and mid-aged students (26–30 years, $r = 0.931$) exhibited very high positive relationships, while students aged 21–25 years showed a moderately strong relationship ($r = 0.686$). No significant relationship was found among older students (31+ years, $p = 0.365$). The study recommended among others that universities should implement comprehensive mental health programmes. These programs should include counselling services, stress management workshops, and coping strategies for academic pressure. Early intervention programs should be established to support students at risk and prevent the escalation of academic anxiety into suicidal behaviour.

Keywords: Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour

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Introduction

Records have shown with empirical evidences that academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour have become significant issues affecting university students worldwide. In Anambra State, Nigeria, the situation appears particularly concerning, especially for final-year undergraduates who face intense academic pressures, career expectations, and societal demands. These students, on the brink of graduation, often encounter heightened stress due to the need to meet academic deadlines, complete rigorous coursework, and prepare for an uncertain job market. The combination of these pressures can lead to overwhelming anxiety, which, if left unaddressed, may result in severe mental health consequences, including suicidal ideation and behaviour. Academic anxiety often heightened by the pressures of academic performance, expectations from peers and family, and the challenges of adjusting to higher education. As students navigate this demanding environment, the risk of developing mental health issues; including suicidal behaviour, increases.

Academic anxiety also referred to as test or examination anxiety is a type of anxiety specifically related to academic performance. It is characterised by feelings of worry, fear, or apprehension before, during, or after exams or assignments (Okechukwu, Ogba, Nwufo, et al., 2022). This anxiety can arise when students experience stress related to their academic works. It can manifest through physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, or difficulty concentrating. While some degree of anxiety is normal, for some students, this anxiety becomes disproportionate and can significantly interfere with their well-being and ability to function effectively.

In the context of this study, aacademic anxiety is a physiological response to perceived internal or external pressures. It can occur both consciously and unconsciously. Over time, as students face increasing academic demands, their anxiety levels may escalate, making it harder to cope with stressors. Research suggests that academic anxiety becomes particularly harmful when students are faced with situations, they feel ill-equipped to handle (Kalaldeh & Shosha, 2020). Certain students may be more susceptible to experiencing academic anxiety than others. For example, studies have shown that higher levels of perceived academic anxiety are linked to a greater risk of suicidal behaviour (Lane & Williams, 2020). According to the American College Health Assessment (ACHA, 2021), 43.7% of college students report above-average academic anxiety, with 11% experiencing tremendous anxiety. Moreover, 30.3% of students have indicated that academic anxiety has negatively impacted their mental health.

These high rates of academic anxiety may have stemmed from being separated from familiar support systems, combined with the challenges of the collegiate environment. The demands of academic work, vocational concerns, financial difficulties, and interpersonal problems can contribute to an increased sense of stress. For students already struggling with academic anxiety, these factors may cause feelings of overwhelm and hopelessness. As their anxiety grows,

they may experience a sense of loss of control, which can make them more vulnerable to suicidal behaviour.

Suicidal behaviours encompass actions associated with self-inflicted harm or the intent to end one's life, though they do not always result in death (Silverman, 2019). Suicidal behaviours encompass ideation, planning, and attempts related to self-harm or suicide, whether or not they result in death. These behaviours exist on a continuum from passive thoughts without specific intent to active planning and attempts, reflecting varying degrees of psychological risk and intent (Klonsky et al., 2016). These behaviours often communicate underlying suicidal thoughts or intentions, ranging in severity and frequency. In this study, suicidal behaviours refer to a spectrum of actions, from persistent thoughts about ending one's life to more concrete plans and attempts. This spectrum includes passive suicidal ideation (thoughts without intent) and active ideation (thoughts with intent). It also involves planning, where individuals develop specific methods or strategies for self-harm, representing an elevated risk of progressing to attempts. Finally, suicidal behaviours encompass actual attempts to end one's life, which may not always be fatal but reflect serious distress and risk.

Suicidal behaviour among university students is increasingly recognized as a serious public health concern, marked by thoughts of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and attempts to end one's life. Research consistently shows that university students are at elevated risk for suicidal ideation compared to the general population, which can be attributed to several unique stressors associated with this life stage. Klonsky, May, and Saffer (2016) present a comprehensive review of the current understanding of suicide, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation, focusing on the psychological mechanisms, risk factors, and prevention strategies associated with suicidal behaviours. Their work highlights the complexity of suicidal ideation and attempts, emphasizing that these behaviours are not isolated or straightforward but are influenced by multiple interacting factors.

Academic challenges are closely linked to academic anxiety, as the pressures and demands of university life can heighten feelings of stress and worry related to academic performance. Academic anxiety, specifically tied to school-related tasks like exams, assignments, and overall performance expectations, is often a response to the intense academic challenges students face (Webb & Hirsch, 2021). One primary academic challenge contributing to academic anxiety is the pressure to achieve high grades. In competitive academic environments, students frequently feel that their future success depends on their performance, creating intense fear of failure. This fear can result in test anxiety, where students experience heightened physical symptoms, such as increased heart rate, sweating, or shaking, as well as cognitive difficulties, like memory lapses or difficulty concentrating (Azuji, et al., 2015). When these physical and mental symptoms occur, they can impede students' ability to perform well, creating a cycle where academic anxiety and performance issues reinforce each other. (Davis & Weathers, 2020).

Academic anxiety refers to the feelings of worry, fear, and apprehension that students experience in response to academic tasks, such as exams, assignments, or presentations. This type of anxiety can interfere with students' cognitive abilities, resulting in difficulty focusing, recalling information, and performing well in academic settings (Cassady & Pierson, 2021). Academic anxiety is also defined as a psychological condition marked by stress responses triggered by academic expectations and pressures. It often manifests as physical symptoms, including sweating, heart palpitations, and stomach discomfort, particularly in testing or performance situations (Zeidner & Matthews, 2022). In this study, academic anxiety refers to the distress or fear students feel regarding their academic performance, which can become debilitating and lead to avoidance behaviours, procrastination, and poor academic outcomes. This form of anxiety is often associated with a perceived threat to one's self-worth or future success

When students perceive their academic performance as central to their identity or as a predictor of their future success, they are more likely to experience heightened anxiety around academic tasks and situations. One aspect of academic anxiety associated with self-worth is the fear of failure. Students with high academic anxiety often worry that poor performance will signal personal inadequacy, leading them to internalize mistakes or setbacks as a sign of unworthiness (Putwain & Aveyard, 2020). This can result in a cycle of anxiety where the fear of failure leads to avoidance behaviours, such as procrastination, which then impacts academic performance, further reinforcing their sense of inadequacy. Over time, this can cause students to doubt their abilities and even disengage from academic activities, impacting their confidence and willingness to take on challenges.

Gender differences can play a critical role in how academic anxiety manifests and affects students' mental health. Studies have shown that female students often report higher levels of academic anxiety than male students. This is possibly due to societal expectations, academic pressures, and gender-specific stressors such as balancing academic performance with domestic responsibilities (Musa & Shittu, 2021). Female students may be more likely to internalize anxiety, experiencing greater emotional distress and feeling a higher sense of responsibility to meet academic and social expectations, which may increase their vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Uduigwomen, 2019). On the other hand, male students may experience academic anxiety differently, sometimes expressing it through external behaviours such as aggression, withdrawal, or disengagement, rather than emotional distress (Ayodele et al., 2020). However, a study by Uduigwomen (2019) indicated that although male students report lower levels of anxiety, they may still be at significant risk of suicidal behaviour, especially when faced with academic pressure without appropriate support systems. Uduigwomen noted that although the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour in male students may not always

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be overt as with female, but can be a significant issue that requires attention.

The urban-rural divide adds another layer of complexity to understanding academic anxiety. Students in urban areas often have access to better resources, including mental health support, academic counselling, and a wide range of extracurricular opportunities. Despite these advantages, they may experience heightened academic anxiety due to the competitive and fast-paced environment of urban universities. The pressure to succeed in a city that offers numerous academic and professional opportunities can exacerbate stress and anxiety, particularly as students approach their final year (Opara & Ajani, 2021). In contrast, students from rural areas often face additional challenges that can exacerbate academic anxiety. These challenges may include limited access to academic resources, fewer opportunities for social support, and sometimes financial difficulties. Furthermore, rural students might experience greater feelings of isolation, both socially and academically, which can heighten their anxiety and increase the risk of suicidal behaviour. The findings of Opara and Ajani suggest that rural students often feel disconnected from the broader university community, which can exacerbate their stress levels, especially when they face academic challenges. Thus, the combination of academic pressure and a lack of support can make rural students particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, including suicidal ideation and attempts.

Previous studies have demonstrated that academic anxiety could lead to physical and emotional distress, with significant consequences on academic performance and personal functioning (Putwain & Aveyard, 2020). In some cases, such stressors have been linked to suicidal ideation and attempts, particularly when students feel overwhelmed and without adequate coping mechanisms (Cassady & Pierson, 2021). This study therefore sought to examine the specific relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among university students in Anambra State. The study aims to provide valuable insights that could inform interventions aimed at reducing mental health risks and improving student well-being across both urban and rural campuses.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal educational setting, final-year undergraduates should experience a supportive academic environment that fosters mental resilience and well-being, enabling them to focus on their studies, plan for their futures, for s successful transition into their chosen careers. The ideal university environment would provide students with adequate counselling services, career support, and resources to manage academic pressures effectively, reducing anxiety levels and preventing adverse mental health outcomes, including suicidal thoughts or behaviours. However, in public universities in Anambra State, the reality appears to fall short of this ideal. Increasingly, final-year students face heightened levels of academic anxiety driven by various stressors. The demands and pressures of academic life, particularly for final-year undergraduates, can lead to significant levels of anxiety. In

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Nigeria, especially within public universities in Anambra State, students in their final year often face unique stressors, including high academic expectations, fear of failure, uncertain future employment prospects, and for some, financial burdens. Such academic anxiety, if unaddressed, may contribute to mental health challenges, potentially escalating to suicidal thoughts or behaviour among vulnerable students.

Reports and anecdotal evidences suggested an increase in psychological distress and suicidal tendencies among university students in Nigeria, indicating a potential link between academic pressures and suicidal behaviour. However, the specific nature and extent of the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour remain underexplored, particularly within Anambra State's public universities. Without a thorough understanding of this relationship, interventions aimed at reducing academic anxiety and preventing suicidal behaviour may be limited in effectiveness, putting students at continued risk. Therefore, to fill the observed gap in literature, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. By identifying the correlation between these variables, this research aims to provide insights that can inform university counselling services, mental health programmes, and policy interventions designed to support students' well-being.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.
2. Investigate the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.
3. Find out the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.
4. Examine the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among young and old final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. The theoretical significance of the study is anchored on Strain Theory for Suicide. The strain theory of suicide, developed by Jie Zhang in 2009, provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the psychological pressures that may lead individuals toward suicidal behaviour. According to Zhang, suicide results from various "strains," or conflicting pressures, that an individual feels unable to resolve. This theory identifies four main types of strains that can contribute to suicidal behaviour: (1)

conflicting values, (2) conflicting aspirations, (3) relative deprivation, and (4) deficient coping mechanisms in stressful situations. The strain theory is highly relevant to this study.

In the context of this study, the strain theory highlights how final-year undergraduates may experience significant psychological strain due to the pressure to succeed academically, secure a stable career, and meet both personal and societal expectations. For instance, Zhang's concept of conflicting aspirations applies to students who aspire to high academic achievement but face obstacles such as limited resources, time, or support systems. This discrepancy between their ambitions and their perceived ability to achieve them can create intense anxiety and strain, particularly as students near graduation and confront the pressures of transitioning into the workforce. By applying Zhang's strain theory, this study can better understand the psychological conflicts that underlie the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour.

Practically, the study would be of immense benefit to the following when published in journals, periodicals, articles, presented in conferences, seminars and workshops and copies deposited in libraries for public access: Students, parents, counsellors, educational psychologists, stakeholders, such as: educational managers, policy makers, government and future researchers.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to students. The study would help students understand the impact of academic anxiety on mental health and its potential link to suicidal behaviours. Through awareness and education, students can gain insight into coping strategies to manage academic stress and improve their well-being. Additionally, by highlighting the importance of mental health resources, the study may encourage institutions to establish supportive services that directly benefit students' mental health and academic performance.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to parents. Parents would gain a deeper understanding of how academic pressures may affect their children's mental health, particularly during critical periods like the final year of university. Equipped with this knowledge, parents can be more empathetic and supportive, learning how to identify signs of academic anxiety and distress in their children. This may enable them to provide emotional support and encourage their children to seek professional help if needed.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to guidance counsellors. The study would offer counselors insight into the prevalence and severity of academic anxiety and its relationship with suicidal behaviour among students. Counselors can use these findings to develop targeted interventions and preventive programs tailored to address students' academic anxiety. This may include workshops on stress management, individual counselling sessions focused on anxiety reduction, and peer support groups that build students' resilience against academic pressures.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to educational psychologists. Educational psychologists will benefit from an evidence-based understanding of how academic anxiety correlates with suicidal

behaviour in students. The findings would guide psychologists in designing mental health assessments and intervention programs that are responsive to students' needs, helping them to identify at-risk individuals and provide tailored mental health support in an academic setting.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to educational managers and stakeholders such as parents. Educational managers and stakeholders would be better equipped to create a supportive learning environment that reduces academic pressure on students. By understanding the impact of academic anxiety on students' mental health, educational managers can implement policies that balance academic rigor with mental wellness. This could involve training programs for teachers to recognize signs of distress, creating flexible grading systems, or promoting extracurricular activities that reduce stress.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to policy makers and government Policymakers and government officials will gain data-driven insights into the mental health challenges faced by students, specifically in the context of academic stress and suicidal tendencies. This study can inform policy changes that prioritize mental health in educational institutions, such as mandating mental health services on campuses, funding mental health awareness campaigns, or incorporating mental health education into curricula. By addressing these issues at the policy level, the government can support sustainable mental health initiatives within educational systems.

Findings of the study would be beneficial to future researchers. Future researchers will benefit from the findings as they offer a foundation for further exploration of academic anxiety, suicidal behaviour, and mental health among students. This study can serve as a basis for comparative studies across different states or academic levels and can highlight areas that may require deeper investigation, such as the role of social support or cultural factors in academic anxiety. Future researchers can also build on this study to develop more comprehensive models or intervention programs aimed at improving student mental health outcomes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?
2. To what extent does academic anxiety correlate with suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?
3. What is the extent of relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?
4. To what extent does academic anxiety correlate with suicidal behaviour among young and old final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?

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Hypotheses

The following hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.
3. No significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.
4. There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among young and old final year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State

Theoretical Framework

Strain Theory of Suicide (Zhang, 2009)

The Zhang's theory explains the socio-psychological mechanisms prior to suicidal behaviour. The theory posits that a suicide is usually preceded by some psychological strains (Zhang, 2009). This explains that suicide is primarily driven by psychological strains that arise when individuals face conflicting and irreconcilable stressors in their lives. Zhang's theory focuses on four types of psychological strains: value strain, aspiration strain, deprivation strain, and coping strain. These strains arise from intense pressures, conflicting expectations, and feelings of inadequacy, which can lead individuals to view suicide as a potential escape from their overwhelming circumstances. The theoretical significance of Zhang's Strain Theory of Suicide lies in its capacity to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how academic anxiety may contribute to suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduate in public universities.

Relevance of Strain Theory of Suicide to the Study

Among final-year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State, academic anxiety could act as a source of various strains outlined by Zhang. For instance, many final-year students experience significant academic pressure as they work toward high-stakes goals, such as graduation, job placement, or further academic opportunities. These aspirations can conflict with students' current academic abilities or perceived competencies, resulting in high levels of academic anxiety. The gap between their goals and their perceived ability to achieve them may increase feelings of hopelessness and strain, which could contribute to suicidal ideation. Also, students may experience value strain if they feel pressured to succeed academically in ways that conflict with their personal identity or values. Academic expectations from family or society may heighten this strain, especially if students believe they cannot meet these standards, which can intensify feelings of inadequacy or despair.

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Students may also experience deprivation strain if they feel they are missing out on necessary resources, such as adequate academic support, financial assistance, or emotional support. Economic hardship, limited resources, or a lack of access to mental health services can exacerbate academic anxiety, leading students to experience heightened feelings of deprivation and isolation, which could potentially foster suicidal thoughts. Coping strain occurs when students face significant challenges without the tools or resources to manage them effectively. Students who lack coping mechanisms to handle academic anxiety may feel overwhelmed by the pressures of their final year, resulting in a sense of helplessness. This inability to manage academic pressures can lead to intense strain, which may increase their vulnerability to suicidal behaviour.

Thus, by applying Zhang's Strain Theory of Suicide, the study can explore how these specific psychological strains caused by academic anxiety may influence suicidal behaviour among final-year students. Zhang's framework underscores the cumulative impact of these strains and highlights how the inability to reconcile or escape from conflicting pressures can contribute to suicidal behaviour. In this way, Zhang's Strain Theory provides a relevant lens through which to examine the role of academic anxiety as a significant factor in suicidal behaviour, guiding both the identification of at-risk students and the development of supportive interventions that can be tailored to their specific psychological needs.

Method

Research Design

The study adopted a Correlation survey research design. Correlation research design is a type of design that tries to ascertain the relationship between one variable and another. According to Nwogu (2019) correlation design seeks to establish the magnitude and direction of relationship between two or more variables in a study. This design was adopted in order to help the researcher find out if there is a relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour as the variables in the study.

Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Anambra State, consisting of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, both in Anambra State. The study covered only the faculty of Education in the two universities, comprising of 14 departments. Anambra State is made up of three education zones, namely: Anambra North, Anambra Central, and Anambra South. Anambra State is bound on the North by Kogi State, to the East by Enugu State, to the West by Delta State, and to the South by Imo State. The inland of the State observes three weather seasons namely: Rainy season, Dry season, and Harmattan season. Anambra State is the home of different people of different religion and culture. Christianity like: Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal, Sabbath, Cherubim and Seraphim enjoy greater fellowship in the area but traditional religion also exists with few adherents. There is presence of vibrant commercial and industrial activities with many

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manufacturing companies (including: furniture, pharmaceutical, metal work, colour photo laboratories, as well as event centres, guest houses, hotels and recreation avenues etc.) and various markets for various articles in the state. The people are predominantly Igbo by tribe and their occupations includes: civil servants, business tycoons, entrepreneurs, traders, farmers and artisans. The State has one hundred and seventeen (117) communities and five (5) tertiary institutions. The state is rich in arable soil which makes the people notable for their agricultural prowess in the rural areas. The state is known for its high value on education as evidenced by presence of many education institutions. There are many academic scholars in the state and they have high admiration and commitment for western education as evidenced in their being described as educational advantaged state. Anambra state is also known for her rich culture and cultural heritage like: Ogbunike Cave, Nri cultural centre, Agulu lake, Owelle Ezukala waterfalls etc., which makes it a tourist state.

Population of the Study

The population of the current study comprised1,466 final-year undergraduates enrolled in the Faculty of Education at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This population included363 male and 1,103 female final-year students, with a higher representation of female students in the two institutions. The selection of these universities was significant due to the reported increase in cases of suicide among the students. This growing concern highlights the need for focused research on the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal tendencies within these universities, as it aligns with the broader aim of understanding how academic pressures impact mental health, especially among final-year students nearing the completion of their studies.

The choice of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka was purposeful, given the increasing reports of academic anxiety and the corresponding rise in suicidal behaviour exhibited by students in these institutions. The population is specifically drawn from the Faculty of Education, which is a critical area to examine given that education students may face unique academic pressures, such as high expectations and performance demands that could exacerbate mental health issues. The total population provides a diverse sample that includes both male and female students from two distinct public universities, making it suitable for investigating the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study comprised 288 final-year undergraduates (75 males &213 females) selected from the target population. This sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, a statistical method for calculating appropriate sample sizes based on a given population, ensuring representativeness and reliability of the findings.

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The population comprised final-year undergraduates from 16 departments within the Faculty of Education at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The population was divided into 16 strata, with each stratum representing a department. This stratification ensured that each department was proportionally represented in the sample, mirroring its size within the overall population. To maintain proportionality, Osegbo et al. (2009)'s approach was followed. A fixed number of 18 students were randomly selected from each department, ensuring consistent representation across departments regardless of variations in departmental population sizes.

After stratifying by department, random sampling technique was applied within each stratum. This random selection process ensured that every student within a department had an equal chance of being chosen, eliminating selection bias. With 18 students selected from each of the 16 departments, the total sample size amounted to 288 participants. The proportionate stratification ensured that the sample accurately reflected both gender and departmental diversity within the Faculty of Education.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were adopted for this study; Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS), and Paykel Suicide Scale (PSS). Academic Anxiety Scale was developed by Cassady, Pierson, and Sterling (2019) to predict students' depression with measures of general and academic anxieties. It comprised eleven (11) items that had two sections: Section A, and Section B. Section A focused on collection of personal information of respondents while section B focused on collection of rated responses on the questionnaire items distributed. It is a 4-point scale in which the respondents were asked to indicate thus: 1, not at all typical of me, 2, somewhat typical of me, 3, quite typical of me, 4, very typical of me. Higher scores indicate higher level of academic anxiety.

The Paykel Suicidal Scale was developed by Paykel et al., (1974). The PSS is a tool originally designed for the evaluation of the presence of passive and active manifestations of suicidal behaviour. It consisted of five (5) items about suicidal thoughts and attempts, including: life-weariness, death wishes, suicidal ideation, and suicidal plans. It is a dichotomous scale. Sum of the individual responses for each item reflects severity of suicidal tendency in the target group.

Validation of the Instruments

The instruments were subjected to face validation by three experts, one in the field of Measurement and Evaluation and two in psychology, drawn from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam Campus, and Anambra State. They were asked to scrutinize the items of the instruments in terms of relevance to the study and adequacy of the items in eliciting information to answer the research questions. The validators were also asked to examine the clarity and appropriateness of language of communication. The comments, suggestions and criticisms that

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were made independently by the experts helped the researcher to correct, modify, and produced the final copy of the instruments for data collection

Reliability of the instrument

To establish the reliability of the instruments (PSQ & AAS), 30 copies of the instruments were administered to a group of 30 students in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The reason was based on the notion that the students possess similar characteristics with the population of the study. Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimate was used to determine the internal consistency of the Academic Anxiety Scale. A coefficient of 0.86 was obtained for Academic Anxiety Scale. Kuder Richardson 20 ($K\text{-}R_{20}$) was used to determine the temporal stability of the Paykel Suicide and a coefficient of coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. This was an indication that the instruments were highly reliable for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher together with two research assistants adopted Direct Delivery Method to administer the questionnaires to the students. These research assistants were briefed by the researcher on the purpose of the study and how to administer the questionnaire. The use for the research assistants was to facilitate quick administration and retrieval of the questionnaire copies from the respondents. Furthermore, the researcher assured the respondents of their utmost confidentiality as the results were strictly used for research purposes and all other ethical considerations were observed. On the spot method was used in the administration of 288 copies of the research instrument and the retrieval of the completed questionnaires. However, while a total of 288 copies of the questionnaire were administered, only 286 were successfully retrieved. Thus, the administration of the instruments to the respondents yielded 99.3 percent return rate which was considered high for a robust study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed thus: Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient; the null hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The interpretation of the findings was done according to Schober et al. (2018), providing a clear framework for understanding the nature and strength of the correlations as follows:

Correlation coefficient	Interpretation
+-0.00 to 0.09 -	Negligible Relationship
+-0.10 to 0.39-	Weak Relationship
+- 0.40 to 0.69 -	Moderate Relationship
+-0.70 to 0.89-	Strong Relationship
0.90 to 1.00 -	Very Strong Relationship

While the negative coefficient indicates a negative relationship, positive co-efficient indicates a positive relationship between variables. For the hypotheses, if p-value is equal to or less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected, but if p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypotheses will not be rejected.

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Presentation Of Results and Data Analysis

Research Question One: What is the extent of relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson r Analysis of the Extent of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

		Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.747
	N	286	286
Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.747	1
	N	286	286

The result in Table 1 presented the results of a Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. It showed that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour is 0.747. This value indicated a strong positive correlation between the two variables. The positive correlation suggests that as academic anxiety increases, suicidal behaviour tends to increase as well among the students studied.

Research Question Two: To what extent does academic anxiety correlate with suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2: Pearson r Analysis of the Correlation of Academic Anxiety with Suicidal Behaviour among Male and Female Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

GENDER			Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Male	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.644
		N	125	125
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.644	1
		N	125	125
Female	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.944
		N	161	161
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.944	1
		N	161	161

The result in Table 2 showed the Pearson correlation analysis of the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour for female and male final-year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r= 0.644) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship

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between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among female students. This suggests that higher levels of academic anxiety are associated with increased suicidal behaviour in females. On the other hand, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.944) shows a very strong positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male students. This indicates that male students with higher academic anxiety (r = 0.944) are much more likely to exhibit suicidal behaviour compared to their female counterparts (r = 0.644). Thus, while both genders are significantly affected, male students showed a much stronger relationship.

Research Question Three: What is the extent of relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State?

Table 3: Pearson r Analysis of the Extent of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Urban and Rural Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

Location			Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Urban	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.546
		N	202	202
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.546	1
		N	202	202
Rural	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.756
		N	84	84
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.756	1
		N	84	84

The result in Table 3 showed Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.546) indicating a moderate positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban-based students. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.756) also indicated a strong positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among rural-based students. This suggests that as academic anxiety increases, there is a stronger likelihood of suicidal behaviour in rural-based students compared to their urban counterparts.

Research Question Four: To what extent does academic anxiety correlate with suicidal behaviour among young and old final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

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Table 4: Pearson r Analysis of the Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Young and Old Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

Age			Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Below 20 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.863
		N	26	26
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.863	1
		N	26	26
21-25 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.686
		N	108	108
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.686	1
		N	108	108
26-30 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.931
		N	121	121
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.931	1
		N	121	121
31 years & above	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.169
		N	31	31
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	-.169	1
		N	31	31

The Pearson r analysis in Table 4 revealed that young Students (<20 years) and mid-aged students (26–30 years) exhibit a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour, with the 26–30 age group showing the strongest correlation (r = 0.931). Students aged 21–25 years also show a strong positive and significant relationship (r = 0.686), but it is less pronounced than in the other younger groups. However, older students (31+ years) demonstrate a weak negative and non-significant relationship (r = −0.169), suggesting that academic anxiety is less of a predictor for suicidal behaviour in this group.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Hypotheses One: There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

Table 5: Pearson Test of Significance of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

		Academic Anxiety	Suicidal Behaviour
Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.747
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	286	286
Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.747	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	286	286

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The result in Table 5 showed that the p-value (p = 0.000) was less than the standard threshold (p < 0.05), indicating that the observed relationship is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State was not accepted

Hypotheses Two: There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

Table 6: Pearson Test of Significance of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Male and Female Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

GENDER			Academic Anxiety	Suicidal Behaviour
Male	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.644**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	125	125
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.644**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	125	125
Female	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.944**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	161	161
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.944**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	161	161

The result in Table 6 revealed that a probability value (p = 0.000) was obtained for both male and female indicating the moderating influence of gender on the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates. The associated probability value of 0.000 for both male and female were less than the 0.05 level of significance set as benchmark for taking decision; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there was a significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male and female final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

Hypotheses Three: No significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

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Table 7: Pearson Test of Significance of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Urban and Rural Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

Location			Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Urban	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.546**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	202	202
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.546**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	202	202
Rural	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.756**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	84	84
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.756**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	84	84

The result in Table 7 further revealed that a probability value of 0.000 was obtained for both urban and rural students, indicating the moderating influence of location on the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

The associated probability value of 0.000 was less than the 0.05 level of significance set as benchmark for taking decision; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, both urban and rural-based final-year undergraduates showed a statistically significant positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour.

Hypotheses Four: There is no significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among young and old final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.

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Table 8: Pearson Test of Significance of Relationship between Academic Anxiety and Suicidal Behaviour among Young and Old Final Year Undergraduates of Public Universities in Anambra State

Age			Academic Anxiety r	Suicidal Behaviour r
Below 20 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.863**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	26	26
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.863**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	26	26
21-25 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.686**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	108	108
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.686**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	108	108
26-30 years	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.931**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	121	121
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.931**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	121	121
31 years & above	Academic Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.169
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.365
		N	31	31
	Suicidal Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	-.169	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.365	
		N	31	31

The result in Table 8 showed that the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates in public universities students below 20 years, 21–25 years, 26–30 years, is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), while the older Students (31+ years) demonstrate a weak negative and non-significant relationship ($r = -0.169$, $p = 0.365$), suggesting that academic anxiety is less of a predictor for suicidal behaviour in this group.

Summary of the Major Findings

The major findings of the study were summarized as follows:

1. There is a high and positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State($r = 0.747$).
2. There is a significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State ($p < 0.001$).
3. There is a high and positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among male ($r = 0.944$) and female

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(r = 0.644) final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State. The relationship is stronger among males (r = 0.944) than among females (r = 0.644).

4. There is a significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among both male and female final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State (p = 0.000).
5. There is a high and positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban (r = 0.546) and rural (r = 0.756) based final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State.
6. There is a significant relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among urban and rural based final year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State (p = 0.000).
7. The relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour is very high and positive among young (<20 years, r=0.863r = 0.863r=0.863) and mid-aged students (26–30 years, r = 0.931), moderately strong among students aged 21–25 years (r = 0.686), but weak and negative among older students (31+ years, r = −0.169).
8. There was a significant relationship (p = 0.000) between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among young (<20 years) and mid-aged students (26–30 years) and students aged 21–25 years, but none statistically significant (p = 0.365) among older students (31+ years).

Conclusion

The study concludes the following:

1. There was a strong positive correlation (r=0.747r = 0.747r=0.747) between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour among final-year undergraduates, emphasizing the pervasive impact of academic stress on mental health in this population.
2. Academic anxiety significantly predicted suicidal behaviour among these students (p<0.001p < 0.001p<0.001), highlighting the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions.
3. While the relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour is high and positive among both male (r=0.944r = 0.944r=0.944) and female (r=0.644r = 0.644r=0.644) students, it is notably stronger among males. This suggests that male students may be particularly vulnerable to anxiety-induced suicidal tendencies, necessitating gender-sensitive support systems.
4. Both urban (r=0.546r = 0.546r=0.546) and rural (r=0.756r = 0.756r=0.756) students exhibit a high and positive relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour, with rural students showing a stronger correlation. This underscores the

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compounded challenges faced by rural students, potentially due to socio-economic factors and limited access to mental health resources.

5. The relationship is very high and positive among young (<20 years, r=0.863r = 0.863r=0.863) and mid-aged (26–30 years, r=0.931r = 0.931r=0.931) students, moderately strong among those aged 21–25 years (r=0.686r = 0.686r=0.686), but weak and negative among older students (31+ years, r=−0.169r = -0.169r=−0.169). This highlighted that, younger and mid-aged students are more susceptible to anxiety-induced suicidal tendencies, while older students may be more resilient or less affected by academic anxiety.
6. The relationship between academic anxiety and suicidal behaviour was statistically significant (p=0.000p = 0.000p=0.000) for students under 30 years, as well as among both male and female students, and urban and rural students. However, no statistically significant relationship (p=0.365p = 0.365p=0.365) exists among older students (31+ years), indicating potential age-related differences in coping mechanisms or perspectives on academic stress.

Recommendations

1. University authorities should establish accessible and confidential mental health support services, including counseling units and crisis intervention teams, to help students manage academic anxiety before it escalates into suicidal thoughts or behaviour. Lecturers, academic advisors, and hostel staff should be given regular training to recognize early signs of academic anxiety and suicidal tendencies and refer students who are at risk to appropriate mental health professionals. Final-year students should be exposed to structured workshops or courses on stress reduction techniques, time management, emotional regulation, and healthy coping mechanisms.
2. University management should strengthen on-campus mental health services by employing trained psychologists and counselors to offer regular therapy sessions and emergency support for students experiencing academic-related stress. Mandatory, periodic psychological assessments should be introduced for final year students to identify those struggling with academic anxiety and provide early interventions. Faculties and departments should create dedicated academic counseling units to assist students with project deadlines, exam preparations, and workload management, thereby reducing anxiety.
3. Universities should develop gender-responsive mental health programmes that address the specific emotional and psychological needs of both male and female students, with a greater focus on supporting male students

who appear more vulnerable to the effects of academic anxiety.

4. University management should ensure that all campuses are equipped with fully functional, gender-inclusive mental health centers staffed with trained psychologists and counselors to address academic anxiety and prevent suicidal behaviour.
5. Since rural-based students are more strongly affected, universities should prioritize the establishment of well-resourced counseling centers and mental health services in rural campuses and areas with higher levels of academic anxiety.
6. Educational policymakers should ensure that mental health resources, trained personnel, and awareness programmes are equitably distributed across both urban and rural university environments to avoid service disparities.
7. University authorities should ensure that mental health support services—such as counseling centers and therapy sessions—are available and accessible on both urban and rural campuses, with tailored programmes to meet the distinct needs of each group. Mental health awareness programmes should be designed to reach all students, regardless of location, using appropriate language, media, and outreach strategies suited to each setting.

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