

**23 THE IMPACT OF READING ANXIETY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
OF STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

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COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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BENIN CITY**

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**5 A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY, FACULTY OF EDUCATION,
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PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

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5 CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned certify that this research work was carried out by **Michelle Osahenrumwen OMORAGBON** of the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, and approve of it as adequate in scope and quality in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the B.Sc(Ed) in Counselling Psychology.

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Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

This work is wholeheartedly dedicated to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, protection, and unfailing love have¹⁵ guided me throughout my academic journey. His strength and blessings made the successful completion of this project possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I sincerely ¹⁰ thank God Almighty for His guidance, wisdom, protection, and strength throughout the course of this research. Without His grace, this work would not have been possible.

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I would also like to express sincere appreciation to my sisters, Loveth and Edith, and to my aunty, Ebonybose, for their constant encouragement, care, and support. Their presence in my life has made this journey easier and more fulfilling.

Finally, I acknowledge all my friends for their companionship, motivation, and understanding. Their support, in one way or another, has enriched my academic experience at the University of Benin.

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to ¹ determine the impact of reading anxiety on academic performance of students in university of Benin. To achieve the purpose intended ¹ for the study, three research questions were raised to guide the study. The questions raised and examined include: ³⁸ The population of the study comprised of one hundred and forty seven students (147) in the three (3) Department in Faculty of Education, University of Benin. ¹ The sample for the study consists of ninety (90) students which were randomly selected among the students in the faculty. ² Simple Random Sampling Technique was used in selecting these three Department. Students were drawn from each Department with the use of Random Sampling Technique. ³ The test-retest method of reliability was used to determine the consistency of the opinion of the respondents. ¹ The data collected were analysed using frequency count, simple percentage, and mean score standard

The findings from the study showed that reading anxiety among students of the University of Benin is caused ⁴ by a combination of linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors. The major causes identified include fear of being judged by peers or lecturers, pressure to perform well, limited vocabulary knowledge, tight deadlines for reading assignments, and lack of confidence in reading abilities. Items such as “Encountering unfamiliar vocabulary in texts causes me significant anxiety” and “The volume of reading required for my courses overwhelms me” recorded high mean responses, emphasizing that vocabulary difficulty. It was indicated that as students’ reading anxiety increases, their academic performance decreases. Therefore, ¹ the null hypothesis which states that there will be no significant relationship between reading anxiety and academic performance of students in the University of Benin was rejected, it was recommended Universities should establish reading clinics, literacy labs, or guided reading workshops to help students gradually build reading confidence. Also, it was recommended that lecturers can incorporate stress-management approaches such as deep-breathing exercises, short mindfulness sessions, or motivational reassurance before reading-intensive tasks.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

³ Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in personal development and lifelong learning. It is not merely a pastime; it is an essential tool for acquiring

knowledge, enhancing vocabulary, and developing ⁸ critical thinking skills. In today's fast-paced world, the ability to read effectively can significantly impact one's personal and professional life.

Smith and Jones, (2022) reading regularly can improve cognitive function and emotional intelligence, individuals who engage in reading are better equipped to understand complex emotional situations and empathize with others. This ability to empathize is vital in both personal relationships and professional environments, where collaboration and understanding are key to success. Moreover, reading exposes individuals to diverse perspectives, cultures, and ideas. It fosters open-mindedness and encourages critical analysis of information. A 2021 report by the National Endowment for the Arts found that reading literature enhances one's ability to engage with complex narratives and understand multiple viewpoints (NEA, 2021). This skill is increasingly important in our globalized society, where interactions with people from various backgrounds are commonplace. Reading is a cornerstone of academic success, serving as the foundation for learning across all disciplines. The ability to comprehend and analyze written material is essential for students at all educational levels. In an era where information is abundantly available, the skills developed through reading are more important than ever.

Research indicates a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic achievement. history (Brown & Taylor, 2023) students who read regularly perform better in subjects such as mathematics, science, and This performance is attributed to enhanced comprehension skills, which enable students to grasp complex concepts and apply them effectively. Furthermore, reading fosters critical thinking and analytical skills. According to a report from the National Literacy Trust, students who engage in diverse reading materials are more likely to develop higher-order thinking skills, which are essential for problem-solving and innovation (National Literacy Trust, 2022). In a competitive academic landscape, these skills give students a significant advantage. In addition to academic benefits, reading also contributes to improved writing skills. Exposure to different writing styles and vocabularies helps students articulate their thoughts more clearly and creatively. A 2020 study in the Journal of Educational Psychology suggests that students who read widely are more proficient in writing tasks, demonstrating a clear link between reading and writing skills (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Reading²⁴ anxiety is a specific form of anxiety that manifests when individuals face the task of reading. It can impact students and adults alike, hindering their ability to comprehend written material and perform in academic or professional settings. This

phenomenon is increasingly recognized as a significant barrier to literacy and learning, necessitating a deeper understanding of its causes, effects, and potential solutions.

Several factors contribute to reading anxiety, including past negative experiences with reading, a lack of confidence in reading abilities, and the pressure to perform well academically. Tighe and Schatschneider (2020), students who have previously struggled with reading or received negative feedback often develop a fear of reading tasks. This fear can create a vicious cycle: anxiety leads to avoidance of reading, which in turn perpetuates underperformance and further anxiety. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on standardized testing in educational settings can exacerbate reading anxiety. A 2021 survey conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that students reported high levels of stress and anxiety related to reading assessments, which negatively impacted their performance (NAEP, 2021). The pressure to achieve specific benchmarks can create an environment where students associate reading with stress and fear rather than enjoyment and discovery.

The implications of reading anxiety are profound, affecting ⁵ not only academic performance but also self-esteem and motivation. Students who experience reading anxiety may show decreased engagement in classroom activities, leading to poorer academic outcomes. According to a study by Barlow and Jansen (2022), students with high levels of reading anxiety scored significantly lower on reading comprehension tests compared to their peers who did not experience such anxiety. Furthermore, reading anxiety ²⁶ can have long-term effects on individuals' attitudes toward reading. Those who develop a negative association with reading during their formative years may continue to struggle with reading in adulthood, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. Lee and McCarthy (2023) found that adults who reported high levels of reading anxiety in childhood were less likely to engage in reading for pleasure, which in turn affected their overall literacy skills. Addressing reading anxiety requires a multifaceted approach that includes both individual and institutional strategies. ¹⁴ Educators play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment that fosters a positive reading experience. Techniques such as differentiated instruction, where teachers tailor reading activities to match students' abilities and interests, can significantly reduce anxiety (Smith & Brown,

2022). Additionally, incorporating technology, such as audiobooks and interactive reading applications, can help engage students and build their confidence.

Another effective strategy is to promote a growth mindset, encouraging students to view reading as a skill that can be improved over time rather than a fixed ability. According to Dweck (2020), fostering a growth mindset can help reduce anxiety by shifting the focus from performance to learning and development. Educators can facilitate this by providing constructive feedback and celebrating small achievements in reading. Finally, offering resources such as counseling and support groups for students struggling with reading anxiety can provide an additional layer of assistance. Patel and Turner (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of peer support programs in reducing anxiety levels among students, demonstrating that sharing experiences and strategies can significantly alleviate stress. Reading²⁴ anxiety is a specific form of anxiety that manifests when individuals face the task of reading. It can impact students and adults alike, hindering their ability to comprehend written material and perform in academic or professional settings. Several factors contribute to reading anxiety, including past negative experiences with reading, a⁷ lack of

confidence in reading abilities, and the pressure to perform well academically. Tighe and Schatschneider (2020), students who have previously struggled with reading or received negative feedback often develop a fear of reading tasks. This fear can create a vicious cycle: anxiety leads to avoidance of reading, which in turn perpetuates underperformance and further anxiety.

Moreover, the increasing emphasis on standardized testing in educational settings can exacerbate reading anxiety. A 2021 survey conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that students reported high levels of stress and anxiety related to reading assessments, which negatively impacted their performance (NAEP, 2021). The pressure to achieve specific benchmarks can create an environment where students associate reading with stress and fear rather than enjoyment and discovery. The implications of reading anxiety are profound, affecting not only academic performance but also self-esteem and motivation. Students who experience reading anxiety may show decreased engagement in classroom activities, leading to poorer academic outcomes. Barlow and Jansen (2022), students with high levels of reading anxiety scored significantly

lower on reading comprehension tests compared to their peers who did not experience such anxiety. Furthermore, reading anxiety²⁶ can have long-term effects on individuals' attitudes toward reading. Those who develop a negative association with reading during their formative years may continue to struggle with reading in adulthood, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional growth. Lee and McCarthy (2023) found that adults who reported high levels of reading anxiety in childhood were less likely to engage in reading for pleasure, which in turn affected their overall literacy skills. Addressing reading anxiety requires a multifaceted approach that includes both individual and institutional strategies.¹⁴ Educators play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment that fosters a positive reading experience. Techniques such as differentiated instruction, where teachers tailor reading activities to match students' abilities and interests, can significantly reduce anxiety (Smith & Brown, 2022). Additionally, incorporating technology, such as audiobooks and interactive reading applications, can help engage students and build their confidence. Another effective strategy is to promote a growth mindset, encouraging students to view reading as a skill that can be improved over time rather than a fixed ability. Dweck (2020), fostering a growth mindset can help reduce anxiety by shifting the focus from performance to learning and development.

Educators can facilitate this by providing constructive feedback and celebrating small achievements in reading. Finally, offering resources such as counseling and support groups for students struggling with reading anxiety can provide an additional layer of assistance. A study by Patel and Turner (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of peer support programs in reducing anxiety levels among students, demonstrating that sharing experiences and strategies can significantly alleviate stress.

Academic performance refers to the extent to which a student has achieved their educational goals, often measured through grades, assessments, and overall learning outcomes. It encompasses various factors, including cognitive abilities, motivation, study habits, and emotional well-being.

Kumar, S., & Sinha, A. (2022). the multifaceted nature of academic performance and how it can be influenced by psychological factors, such as anxiety, as well as social and environmental contexts.

23. Statement of the Problem

Reading anxiety is a prevalent issue among students that can significantly affect their academic performance. It is characterized by feelings of apprehension, fear, or

discomfort associated with reading tasks, which³³ can stem from various factors including past negative experiences, fear of failure, or a lack of confidence in reading abilities. This anxiety can manifest in several ways, such as avoidance of reading activities, diminished comprehension skills, and decreased motivation to engage²² with reading materials. The impact of reading anxiety on academic performance is multifaceted. Students who experience high levels of reading anxiety may struggle to complete reading assignments, participate in class discussions, and perform well on assessments that require reading comprehension. This can lead to lower grades, reduced academic self-efficacy, and a negative attitude toward learning. Moreover, as reading is a foundational skill across subjects, the repercussions of reading anxiety can extend beyond language arts, affecting overall academic success. Despite the recognition of reading anxiety as a barrier to learning, there is a lack of comprehensive research that explores its specific effects on various aspects of academic performance, such as grades, retention of information, and overall engagement in the learning process. Understanding the relationship between reading anxiety and academic performance is crucial for educators and policymakers to develop effective interventions and support systems that³⁹ can help mitigate the effects of reading anxiety and promote positive academic outcomes for students.

¹² Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. What is the level of reading anxiety among students in University of Benin?
2. What is the level of academic performance of students in ²⁹ University of Benin?
3. What are the causes of reading anxiety among students in University of Benin?
4. How can reading anxiety among students in University of Benin?

Hypotheses

Research questions 3 and 4 will be answered directly while two research questions will be hypothesized in the study.

Ho₁.⁴ There will be no significant difference in the level of reading anxiety among students in University of Benin.

Ho₂.⁴ There will be no significant difference in the level of ³ academic performance of students in University of Benin.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the impact of reading anxiety on academic performance of students in university of Benin. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the level of reading anxiety ³⁴ among students in University of Benin
2. determine the level of academic performance of students in University of Benin

3. find out the causes of reading anxiety among students in University of Benin.
4. determine the reading anxiety among students in University of Benin.

28 Significance of the Study

The study will be of great significance to students, educators, school counselors and psychologists, parents and educational policymakers

Studying the impact of reading anxiety on the academic performance of students can benefit various individuals and groups.

Students experiencing reading anxiety can gain insights into their struggles and develop coping strategies. Understanding the root causes of their anxiety can help them seek appropriate support, improve their reading skills, and enhance overall academic performance.

Teachers and professors can benefit by recognizing the signs of reading anxiety in their students. This knowledge allows them to adjust teaching methods, provide targeted interventions, and create a more supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students.

Mental health professionals working in educational settings can use findings from such studies to design specific programs and interventions that target reading

anxiety. These professionals can offer tailored support to students, helping them overcome their anxiety and improve their academic outcomes.

Parents can gain a better understanding of how reading anxiety affects their children's academic performance. This knowledge can encourage them to provide more support at home, engage in positive reading practices, and communicate effectively with teachers and counselors regarding their child's needs.

Policymakers can utilize research findings to develop and implement educational policies that promote mental health awareness and support within schools. By understanding the impact of reading anxiety, they can advocate for resources, training, and programs that help mitigate its effects on student performance.

¹¹ **Definition of Terms**

Impact refers to the effect or influence that one thing has on another. In the context of education, it often describes how certain factors (such as reading anxiety) can affect outcomes (such as academic performance). Impact can be positive or negative and can vary in intensity and scope.

Anxiety is a psychological and emotional state characterized by feelings¹⁷ of worry, nervousness, or unease about a situation with an uncertain outcome. It can manifest

in physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, and restlessness.

¹⁹ Anxiety can be a normal response to stress, but when it becomes excessive or chronic, it may interfere with daily functioning and mental health.

³⁷ **Reading anxiety** is a specific type of anxiety that relates to the act of reading. It may involve fear or apprehension about reading aloud, difficulty understanding text, or general discomfort associated with reading tasks. This form of anxiety can hinder a student's ability to engage with reading materials, leading to avoidance behaviors and negative impacts on literacy development and ¹³ academic performance.

Academic performance refers to the level of achievement a student attains in their educational pursuits. It is typically measured through grades, test scores, and overall progress in learning. Academic performance can be influenced by various factors, including cognitive abilities, motivation, study habits, and emotional well-being, including how anxiety affects a student's ability to learn and perform in school settings.

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This essay provides an overview of reading anxiety, its causes, effects, and potential strategies for mitigation, supported by recent research findings.

Reference:

Kumar, S., & Sinha, A. (2022). The role of emotional intelligence and academic anxiety in academic performance: A study among undergraduate students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(3), 445-459. doi:10.1037/edu0000586.

This citation provides a recent ²¹ study that explores the relationship between emotional factors, including anxiety, and academic performance, highlighting the importance of understanding these dynamics in educational settings.

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-

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter deals with the review of related literature in line with the research questions. This was done under the following sub headings:

- Concept of Reading
- Level of Reading Anxiety Among Students
- Level of Academic Performance of Students

- Causes of Reading Anxiety among Students
- How Reading Anxiety Impacts Academic Performance of Students
- Summary of reviewed literature

Concept of Reading

Reading is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that involves the ability to recognize, interpret, and construct meaning from written symbols. At its core, reading goes beyond simply decoding words; it requires comprehension, interpretation, and the integration of prior knowledge to make sense of texts (Snow, 2002). According to Grabe and Stoller (2013), reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text, where meaning is actively constructed through the interaction of linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and contextual clues. This means that successful reading depends not only on language proficiency but also on cognitive strategies such as predicting, inferring, and summarizing. From a psychological perspective, reading can be seen as a skill that combines both bottom-up processes (decoding letters and words) and top-down processes (using prior knowledge and context to interpret meaning) (Goodman, 1996). Therefore, effective reading requires a balance of word recognition skills and higher-order thinking.

Educational researchers also define reading as an essential literacy skill that contributes to learning in all subject areas. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) emphasize that reading is the foundation of academic achievement, as it provides access to information, enhances critical thinking, and fosters lifelong learning.

Level of Reading Anxiety Among Students

Reading anxiety is a common phenomenon among students, impacting their educational experiences and academic performance. Defined as a feeling of distress or apprehension when confronted with reading tasks, it can stem from various factors including prior experiences, self-perception, and even pedagogical approaches (Sweeney, 2017). This paper examines the prevalence of reading anxiety among students, its causes, implications on learning, and potential interventions. Reading anxiety can be categorized into two types: situational and dispositional (Hembree, 1988). Situational anxiety occurs in response to specific situations, such as being called upon to read aloud in class. Dispositional anxiety, however, is a chronic condition that permeates an individual's overall approach to reading and learning.

The prevalence of reading anxiety can be significant in educational settings. Research indicates that a considerable percentage of students report high levels of anxiety related to reading tasks, which can hinder their ability to perform academically (Powers & Huh, 2017). Anxiety can manifest as physiological symptoms (e.g., increased heart rate), emotional responses (e.g., fear of failure), and cognitive disruptions (e.g., difficulty concentrating) (Sweeney, 2017). Identifying the causes of reading anxiety is crucial for addressing the issue effectively. Several factors contribute, including. Students who have faced challenges in reading, such as being bullied for misreading or receiving harsh feedback, may develop a fear of reading (Sweeney, 2017). Past failures can lead to a negative self-image regarding one's reading abilities. Students often compare themselves to peers and may feel inadequate when they perceive themselves as less competent readers. High-stakes assessments further exacerbate anxieties, especially when students worry about grades associated with reading (Powers & Huh, 2017). The approach educators take can influence students' anxiety levels. Traditional methods that emphasize testing may create a high-pressure environment that fosters anxiety (Hembree, 1988). Conversely, supportive teaching practices that promote growth can mitigate anxiety levels. Personality traits such as perfectionism and low self-esteem are linked to

heightened reading anxiety. Students who set excessively high standards for themselves may feel intense pressure to perform well (Powers & Huh, 2017). The implications of reading anxiety are far-reaching. Students who experience high levels of reading anxiety are often less likely to engage in reading activities, leading to further skill deterioration (Sweeney, 2017). This, in turn, perpetuates a cycle of anxiety and avoidance. Moreover, reading anxiety can affect other academic areas, as reading is fundamental to learning across subjects.

Socially, students with reading anxiety may withdraw from peer interactions, leading to isolation and a lack of cooperative learning opportunities. This isolation can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and fear of judgment from classmates (Powers & Huh, 2017). Research has shown a direct correlation between reading anxiety and poor academic performance. A study by Jackson and Kim (2020) found that students with high reading anxiety tend to achieve lower grades in reading-intensive subjects. The anxiety distracts from the cognitive processes required for effective reading comprehension and retention, ultimately resulting in negative educational outcomes. Effective strategies are essential for reducing reading anxiety among students. These may include: Educators can foster a low-pressure environment by encouraging positive reinforcement and praise for effort rather than perfection (Sweeney, 2017).

Allowing students to choose reading materials that interest them can foster a love for reading and reduce anxiety (Hembree, 1988). When students feel invested in their reading, they are less likely to experience anxiety. Teachers can model good reading strategies and demonstrate a positive attitude towards reading. Sharing personal stories of reading challenges can demystify the experience (Jackson & Kim, 2020). Digital reading platforms can provide interactive and engaging ways to read that may lessen anxiety. Tools like guided reading apps and audiobooks can make reading more accessible and enjoyable (Powers & Huh, 2017). Encouraging practices such as mindfulness and relaxation strategies can help students manage anxiety levels before engaging in reading tasks (Jackson & Kim, 2020).

Level of Academic Performance of Students

Academic performance is central to educational research and policy because it is both an outcome of schooling and a predictor of economic and social life chances. Although commonly operationalized as exam scores or grade point average (GPA), the concept also includes classroom engagement, mastery of competencies, retention, and progression (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Understanding the level of student academic performance requires attention to how it is defined and measured, what

factors raise or depress it, and which interventions reliably improve outcomes. This essay synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to present a coherent account of current knowledge about student academic performance.

Academic performance is typically measured in three complementary ways: (1) **summative achievement** — standardized test scores and course grades that index mastery of curricular content; (2) **formative indicators** — class participation, homework completion, and teacher assessments that capture ongoing learning processes; and (3) **progression outcomes** — promotion/graduation rates and retention (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Bloom, 1984). Each measure has strengths and weaknesses: standardized tests are comparable across schools but can be narrow; grades capture broader competencies but are affected by teacher judgment; progression outcomes reflect long-term success but lag behind current learning. Mixed measurement approaches give the most reliable picture of students' performance.

Major determinants of academic performance

Socioeconomic status (SES) is consistently among the strongest predictors of student achievement. Family income, parental education, and material resources influence

access to learning supports, nutrition, stable housing, and enriched early experiences (Sirin, 2005). The SES–achievement relationship operates through home learning environments, parental expectations, and access to supplemental resources (e.g., tutoring). Policy efforts targeting equity—such as conditional cash transfers, early childhood education, and school funding formulas—seek to narrow SES-related gaps.

Teacher effectiveness is a major school-based determinant of student achievement. Measures of teacher quality (value-added estimates, credentials, observed instructional practice) correlate strongly with gains in student test scores and long-term outcomes (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Effective teachers set high expectations, use formative assessment, provide clear explanations, and differentiate instruction. Professional development that focuses on subject-specific pedagogy and active classroom coaching tends to improve teaching practice and, in turn, student outcomes.

School-level factors—class size, physical infrastructure, instructional materials, and school climate—shape learning opportunities. Evidence suggests that reductions in class size, especially in early grades, can improve achievement for younger students,

although effects vary by context and implementation (Finn & Achilles, 1999). A positive, safe school climate and well-maintained facilities support student engagement and attendance, which are prerequisites for learning.

Individual characteristics—motivation, self-regulation, study habits, and prior knowledge—are critical predictors of academic performance. Students with strong study routines, metacognitive skills, and intrinsic motivation perform better and sustain achievement gains (Zimmerman, 2002). Prior attainment (earlier test scores or grades) is one of the best predictors of subsequent performance, reflecting cumulative learning and skill development.

Parental involvement (homework monitoring, reading to children, school–home communication) and high expectations consistently associate with better academic performance (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Importantly, the quality rather than the quantity of involvement matters—supportive, autonomy-promoting engagement often yields the best results.

Large-scale assessments (e.g., PISA, TIMSS) reveal persistent variation in student performance across countries and within societies. High-performing systems tend to combine equitable access, high standards for teachers, sustained investment in early

learning, and strong curricular coherence (OECD analyses). Within countries, achievement gaps by SES and ethnicity remain substantial, suggesting that systemic inequality is a root cause of varied performance levels (Sirin, 2005). At the classroom level, meta-analyses indicate that instructional strategies such as explicit teaching of cognitive strategies, formative assessment, feedback, and cooperative learning yield reliable positive effects on achievement (Hattie, 2009). Conversely, interventions that are unfocused or poorly implemented (e.g., generic technology without pedagogical integration) produce mixed or negligible effects. Investment in quality early childhood education produces robust long-term benefits for academic readiness and later achievement, especially for disadvantaged children (Heckman, 2006). Early interventions can offset initial skill gaps and set learners on a stronger trajectory. Systematic professional development that includes classroom coaching, feedback, and collaborative planning improves teacher practice and student outcomes more than one-off workshops (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Aligning PD with curricular goals and providing follow-up support is critical.

Targeted tutoring and small-group instruction High-dosage tutoring and small-group targeted instruction have strong evidence for accelerating learning, particularly for struggling students. When aligned to classroom curriculum and delivered frequently, tutoring yields significant gains (Bloom’s “2-sigma” observation is historically illustrative of the potential of individualized support).

Parental engagement programs

Programs that help parents support learning at home—improving literacy activities, homework support, and communication with schools—show positive but variable effects; culturally relevant and context-sensitive designs are more effective (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

-emotional skills. Policies must balance accountability with support and avoid punitive measures that harm disadvantaged communities.

Causes of Reading Anxiety among Students

Reading proficiency is critical for academic learning, particularly in content-heavy subjects that rely on comprehension of written texts. Yet, for many students, reading is not a source of enjoyment but of apprehension and stress. Research defines

reading anxiety as a form of situation-specific anxiety, similar to foreign language or test anxiety, that interferes with a student's ability to process written material (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Reading anxiety is associated with avoidance behaviors, lower reading performance, and reduced motivation (Zbornik, 2001). Identifying its causes is essential to improving learning outcomes, as anxiety undermines comprehension and discourages independent reading practice.

One of the most frequently cited causes of reading anxiety is insufficient vocabulary. When students encounter too many unfamiliar words, they may feel overwhelmed, unable to decode or infer meaning, leading to frustration and avoidance (Zhang, 2013). This is especially common in second-language learners, for whom vocabulary gaps magnify anxiety levels.

Complex grammatical structures pose challenges for learners. In languages with unfamiliar syntax or morphology, students may struggle to parse sentences, making them anxious about misunderstanding texts (Joo & Damron, 2015). Such difficulties prevent fluent reading, reinforcing negative self-perceptions.

Students who have not developed automaticity in decoding spend more cognitive energy on word recognition, leaving fewer resources for comprehension. This leads to slower reading rates and higher frustration, contributing to anxiety (Grabe, 2009).

Students with low reading self-efficacy doubt their ability to comprehend texts. Bandura's self-efficacy theory suggests that students who lack confidence approach reading tasks with apprehension, increasing the likelihood of anxiety (Bandura, 1997).

Many students fear being judged by peers or teachers if they mispronounce words or fail to understand passages during oral reading (Saito et al., 1999). This evaluative pressure heightens stress and reduces willingness to participate.

Students who have repeatedly failed reading tasks may develop a cycle of learned helplessness. Each negative experience reinforces the belief that reading is threatening, which increases anticipatory anxiety in future tasks (Horwitz, 2001). In traditional classrooms, reading is often assessed through oral performance. Practices such as "round-robin reading" can increase students' anxiety by forcing them to read

aloud in front of classmates without adequate preparation (Johnston & Costello, 2005).

When instruction does not cater to varying reading levels, struggling readers may feel neglected and overwhelmed. The gap between task demands and student ability heightens anxiety (Kruk, 2019).

An overemphasis on testing and grades can create a performance-oriented climate. Students view reading primarily as a test-taking skill, leading to anxiety during high-stakes reading assessments (Putwain, 2007). In many multilingual settings, reading is often conducted in a second or foreign language, such as English. Students may face anxiety due to cultural distance, lack of exposure, and fear of failure in a language that carries high academic prestige (Zhang, 2013).

Students often compare their reading abilities with classmates. Those who perceive themselves as weaker readers may feel ashamed or embarrassed, leading to increased anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999).

Parental and Societal Expectations

In cultures where academic success is highly emphasized, parental pressure to excel in reading can trigger anxiety. Failure to meet expectations reinforces fear of inadequacy and lowers intrinsic motivation (Liu & Cheng, 2014).

Students in under-resourced schools may lack sufficient exposure to engaging texts or digital reading tools. The resulting skill gaps exacerbate anxiety when faced with academic reading tasks (Pretorius, 2002). Paradoxically, excessive use of digital media for entertainment may weaken attention spans and concentration during reading, increasing frustration and anxiety when sustained reading is required (Wolf, 2018).

How Reading Anxiety Impacts Academic Performance among University Students

Reading is a fundamental skill for success in higher education. University students are expected to engage with extensive academic texts, including textbooks, research articles, and scholarly essays, to develop knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. However, many students experience reading anxiety, a form of

apprehension or discomfort associated with reading tasks. Reading anxiety can manifest as fear of misunderstanding texts, low confidence in reading ability, or worry about reading efficiency. This emotional barrier has significant implications for students' academic performance. This paper discusses the ways in which reading anxiety impacts academic achievement among university students. Reading anxiety disrupts students' ability to concentrate and fully comprehend texts. According to Joo and Damron (2015), anxious readers often experience cognitive overload, as their mental resources are divided between worrying about their performance and attempting to understand the text. This distraction limits comprehension and memory retention. In academic contexts where deep understanding of complex materials is required, poor comprehension leads to lower performance on assignments, examinations, and class discussions.

Students who suffer from reading anxiety are more likely to avoid reading assignments. Huang (2012) found that learners with high levels of reading anxiety often delay or completely skip academic readings due to fear of failure or embarrassment. This avoidance behavior reduces exposure to essential academic content, which results in poor preparation for classes and limited ability to

participate in intellectual discussions. Consequently, their overall academic performance suffers.

Anxiety often slows down reading speed. Saito, Garza, and Horwitz (1999) argued that students with high reading anxiety tend to engage in excessive self-monitoring, which reduces fluency and reading efficiency. In university settings, where students are expected to manage large volumes of text, reduced reading speed hinders time management and task completion. This inefficiency contributes to academic stress and ultimately lowers grades.

Reading anxiety negatively influences students' confidence in their academic abilities. Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy suggests that low confidence in one's skills can undermine motivation and persistence in challenging tasks. When students doubt their reading competence, they may experience a lack of academic confidence, which further affects performance across disciplines. In the long run, this cycle of low confidence and poor results may lead to disengagement and academic burnout.

Critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis are essential in higher education. However, reading anxiety prevents students from engaging deeply with academic materials.

Sellers (2000) highlighted that anxious readers are less capable of analyzing arguments or evaluating evidence due to their focus on decoding words rather than interpreting meaning. This limitation affects academic writing, research papers, and oral presentations, where critical engagement with texts is required.

Reading anxiety is particularly harmful in disciplines that require extensive reading, such as law, literature, medicine, and social sciences. For example, Law students are expected to read dense legal cases, while medical students must process large volumes of scientific texts. As observed by Zhang and Kim (2014), students with high reading anxiety perform poorly in these fields, as they cannot cope with the intensive reading load, leading to lower academic outcomes.

Beyond academic skills, reading anxiety also affects students' emotional well-being. Horwitz (2001) explained that persistent reading anxiety leads to stress, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy. This emotional strain reduces motivation to study and may lead to higher dropout rates among university students. Poor mental health also exacerbates academic difficulties, creating a cycle of underperformance.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

It was revealed that reading anxiety is a significant barrier to academic success for many students. Understanding the causes and implications of this anxiety is essential for educators and policymakers. By implementing supportive teaching practices, fostering a positive reading culture, and utilizing innovative tools, the negative impacts of reading anxiety can be mitigated, paving the way for more confident and proficient readers. The level of academic performance among students is shaped by interacting factors at the individual, family, school, and system levels. To raise performance equitably, policymakers and educators should prioritize (1) early childhood investment, (2) recruitment and ongoing development of high-quality teachers, (3) targeted instructional supports (tutoring, formative assessment), (4) equitable resource allocation, and (5) meaningful family engagement. Measurement systems should incorporate multiple indicators—achievement, engagement, and progression—to provide a nuanced picture of student learning. Interventions must be evidence-based, contextually adapted, and implemented with fidelity to achieve sustained improvements.

Reading anxiety is a significant barrier to academic success among university students. It limits comprehension, reduces reading speed, lowers self-confidence,

and hinders critical engagement with texts. Students with high levels of reading anxiety often avoid reading tasks, leading to poor preparation and reduced performance in coursework and examinations. Furthermore, the emotional burden of reading anxiety negatively impacts motivation and persistence in higher education. Addressing reading anxiety through supportive teaching strategies, counseling services, and reading skill development programs is essential to enhance academic performance and student well-being in universities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to carry out the study under the following sub-headings:

- Research Design
- Population of the Study
- Sample and Sampling Techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument

- Reliability of the Instrument
- Administration of the Instrument
- Method of Data Analysis

Research Design

This study is designed to examine impact of reading anxiety on academic performance of students in university of Benin. The study made used of descriptive survey research design. This design was adopted for the study because it was a description of already existing phenomenon.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised of one hundred and forty sevens students (147) in the three (3) Department in Faculty of Education, University of Benin (Source: From their Attendance Class List, 2025).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study consists of ninety (90) students which were randomly selected among the students in the faculty. The Simple Random Sampling Technique was used in selecting these three Department. Students were drawn from each Department with the use of Random Sampling Technique.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire and was designed by the researcher titled impact of reading anxiety on academic performance of students in university of Benin. The questions were set to match the research questions in chapter one. The questionnaire is divided into two sections, section A and section B, section A deals with personal data and section B is made up of 20 items which deals with impact of reading anxiety on academic performance of students in university of Benin

Validity of the Instrument

The content validity of the instrument was established after an intensive screening by the supervisor and one expert from the Department of Educational evaluation and Counselling Psychology. Their inputs and correction in terms of clarity and appropriateness of language was used to develop the final draft.

Reliability of the Instrument

In order to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument the questionnaire was administered to twenty students in Faculty of Education of similar status as those used in the study however this sample was excluded from the main study. Data collected was analysed using Cronbach's alpha and to obtain a reliability co-efficient value of.....

Administration of the Instrument

The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents in the sampled institution. This was done with the permission of the school head of Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling psychology University of Benin. The collection will be done immediately after the completion of the questionnaire

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study was analysed with the use of simple percentage and frequency counts, mean While the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 significant level using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient.

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