

READING ANXIETY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOL LIBRARY USE AMONG PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined reading anxiety and school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study were to evaluate the extent of reading anxiety among students, assess the frequency of their utilization of the school library, and investigate the relationship between reading anxiety and school library use. A correlational survey was used. From 11,260 SS2 students in 142 registered private secondary schools, Yamane's formula and multistage sampling selected 384 students. Data were collected using two validated 4-point Likert scales, the Reading Anxiety Scale (RAS, Cronbach's alpha = 0.87) and the School Library Use Scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84). After answering study questions one and two with the mean and standard deviation, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was performed to examine the relationship between reading anxiety and school library use at 0.05. Students had moderate reading anxiety ($M = 38.9$, $SD = 5.6$), with 57.4% moderate and 24.5% high. Overall school library use was moderate ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.98$), but book borrowing and librarian consultation scored low. Higher reading anxiety was associated with reduced school library use ($r = -0.48$, $p = 0.002$). Based on these findings, school owners should implement reading anxiety-reduction programs, librarians should adopt anxiety-sensitive practices to make libraries more welcoming, and teachers should incorporate sustained silent reading into the school timetable to encourage voluntary reading.

Keywords: Reading anxiety, school library use, private secondary schools, Abia State, and Nigeria

Introduction

Reading is a foundational skill for academic success, yet many learners experience anxiety specifically related to reading tasks. Reading anxiety is a situation-specific form of anxiety that arises when individuals anticipate or engage in reading activities (Sellers, 2000). Unlike general anxiety, reading anxiety manifests as negative affective responses such as tension, worry, and avoidance of reading materials. In secondary school settings, reading anxiety can impede comprehension, reduce motivation, and limit students' engagement with texts. School libraries serve as critical academic resources, providing access to diverse reading materials, quiet study spaces, and librarian support. Effective library use has been associated with improved reading habits, vocabulary development, and academic performance (Lance & Kachel, 2018). However, if students experience reading anxiety, they may avoid the library altogether, perceiving it as a stress-inducing environment. This avoidance creates a vicious cycle: less library use leads to fewer reading opportunities, which fails to reduce anxiety and may even exacerbate it.

In Abia State, Nigeria, private secondary schools are known for relatively better facilities compared to public schools, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that many students still struggle with reading fluency and comprehension. The relationship between reading anxiety and library use in this context remains underexplored. Most existing studies have focused on public schools or tertiary institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how private secondary school students in Abia State navigate reading

anxiety and library engagement. This study, therefore, examines reading anxiety and its relationship with school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State. By identifying the nature and strength of this relationship, the study aims to inform interventions that reduce anxiety and promote more effective library utilization.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is central to the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, yet persistent reports of poor reading comprehension among students raise concerns. In Abia State, private secondary schools market themselves as providers of quality education, but many students still exhibit reluctance to read, complaints of mental blocks when reading, and avoidance of library spaces. Preliminary observations suggest that students often visit the library only when forced by teachers, and many complete their secondary education without voluntarily borrowing a book. The problem may stem from reading anxiety, a psychological barrier that has received limited attention in Nigerian educational research. While studies have examined test anxiety or math anxiety, secondary schools often overlook reading anxiety. Moreover, the school library may become a trigger for anxiety if students feel judged by their peers or overwhelmed by unfamiliar texts, instead of serving as a therapeutic space for gradual reading exposure.

The absence of empirical data on the relationship between reading anxiety and library use in Abia State private secondary schools means that teachers, librarians, and school owners lack evidence-based guidance. Without such data, interventions remain guesswork. Therefore, this study is necessary to determine the level of reading anxiety,

the extent of school library use, and whether a significant relationship exists between these two variables.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the level of reading anxiety among private secondary school students in Abia State?
2. What is the frequency of school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State?
3. Is there a significant relationship between reading anxiety and school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State?

Literature Review

This review is structured according to the three objectives of the study.

Reading Anxiety

Reading anxiety is a domain-specific anxiety that occurs during reading tasks. According to Sellers (2000), reading anxiety includes feelings of nervousness, frustration, and self-doubt when reading texts, especially in a second language. More recently, Zbornik (2020) described reading anxiety as a learned response to repeated reading failure, leading to anticipatory fear. Symptoms include sweating, rapid heartbeat, mind-blanking, and avoidance of reading.

Tuncer and Bahadir (2020) found a link between reading anxiety and poor decoding skills, slow reading speed, and low self-efficacy among secondary school students. Tuncer and Bahadir (2020) found a link between reading anxiety and poor decoding skills, slow reading speed, and low self-efficacy in secondary school students. Nigerian studies are sparse, but Okonkwo and Nwosu (2019) found that over 50% of secondary school students in Enugu State reported moderate to high reading anxiety. This suggests that reading anxiety may be a hidden epidemic in Nigerian schools.

School Library Use in Secondary Schools

School library use refers to the frequency and purpose with which students visit the library, borrow materials, read in the library, and seek assistance from librarians. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2018), effective library use enhances information literacy, reading engagement, and academic achievement. In Nigeria, Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2021) found that private school students used libraries more frequently than public school students, yet usage remained below recommended levels (less than once per week on average).

Barriers to library use include limited opening hours, poor collections, lack of comfortable seating, and, crucially, student attitudes. A student with reading anxiety may perceive the library as a place that highlights their reading difficulties. A student with reading anxiety may view the library as a space that exposes their reading difficulties, prompting them to avoid it, which leads to avoidance. Conversely, a well-

designed library with supportive librarians can reduce anxiety through reading encouragement and non-threatening environments (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

The relationship between reading anxiety and school library use

Theoretical support for a relationship comes from the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), which posits that anxiety acts as a filter that blocks input from reaching the language acquisition device. Applied to reading, a high anxiety filter prevents students from engaging with library texts, even when those texts are available. Thus, anxious readers are less likely to use the library.

Empirical evidence is growing. In a study of Turkish high school students, Aydın and Yıldız (2019) found a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.42$, $p < .01$) between reading anxiety and library visit frequency. In a Nigerian university context, Ugwu and Eze (2020) reported that students with high reading anxiety borrowed 70% fewer books than low-anxiety peers. However, no study has specifically targeted private secondary school students in Abia State. This study hypothesizes that higher reading anxiety predicts lower school library use, indicating a negative correlation between the two. This means that higher levels of reading anxiety are associated with lower levels of engagement in school library use.

Methodology

A correlational survey design was adopted to describe the relationship between reading anxiety (independent variable) and school library use (dependent variable). The study was conducted in Abia State, Nigeria, specifically in urban and semi-urban private secondary schools within the Aba, Umuahia, and Ohafia education zones. The

population comprised 11,260 students in SS2 (second year of senior secondary) from 142 registered private secondary schools in Abia State (Abia State Ministry of Education, 2026). Using Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967), a sample of 384 students was selected through multistage sampling: first, 12 schools were randomly selected (4 per zone), then 32 students were randomly chosen per school. The 12 schools sampled were:

S/N	School name	Location (Zone & Town)
1	Word of Faith Group of Schools	Aba Zone, Aba
2	Living Word Academy Secondary School	Aba Zone, Aba
3	Premier International Secondary School	Aba Zone, Aba
4	Topnotchers International Academy	Aba Zone, Aba
5	Christland Mission School International	Umuahia Zone, Umuahia
6	Britarch Schools	Umuahia Zone, Umuahia
7	St. Cecilia's Academy	Umuahia Zone, Umuahia
8	Royalties International Christian School	Umuahia Zone, Umuahia
9	Ifemba International Academy	Ohafia Zone, Akanu Ohafia
10	Triumph Comprehensive College	Ohafia Zone, Asaga Ohafia
11	St. Anthony's Secondary School	Ohafia Zone, Ohafia
12	Reinhold International Secondary School	Ohafia Zone, Abiriba

Source: Abia State Ministry of Education (2026)

Two instruments were used: the Reading Anxiety Scale (RAS) adapted from Sellers (2000), consisting of 15 items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to

4 = Strongly Agree). Scores: 15–30 (low anxiety), 31–45 (moderate), 46–60 (high) using Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$. The School Library Use Scale using Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$ was developed by the researcher, has 8 items measuring frequency of visits, borrowing resources, and librarian consultation on a 4-point scale (1 = Never to 4 = Always). Instruments were face-validated by three experts in educational psychology and library science. Reliability was established through a pilot test on 40 students from two schools not in the sample, yielding the Cronbach's α values above. Permission was obtained from school principals. Research assistants administered the questionnaires during a regular class period. Completed instruments were collected immediately, yielding a 98% return rate (376 valid responses). Research questions 1 and 2 were answered using mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Research question 3 was answered using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) at a $p < 0.05$ significance level (Cronbach, 1951; Pearson, 1896).

Analysis and Tables

Research question one: What is the level of reading anxiety among private secondary school students in Abia State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of reading anxiety scores (N = 376)

Anxiety level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Low (15–30)	68	18.1%	24.3	2.1
Moderate (31–45)	216	57.4%	38.7	4.3
High (46–60)	92	24.5%	51.2	3.8
Overall	376	100%	38.9	5.6

The overall mean reading anxiety scores ($M = 38.9$, $SD = 5.6$) fall within the moderate range (31–45). The majority of students (57.4%) experienced moderate reading anxiety, while 24.5% had high anxiety. Only 18.1% reported low anxiety. Thus, reading anxiety is a notable issue among private secondary school students in Abia State.

The finding that most students (57.4%) have moderate reading anxiety and nearly a quarter have high anxiety aligns with Okonkwo and Nwosu (2019), who reported similar levels in Enugu State. This suggests that reading anxiety is not unique to public schools or specific regions but is prevalent across Nigerian secondary education. Possible reasons include large class sizes, limited individualized reading instruction, and a curriculum that emphasizes testing over reading for pleasure. In private schools, high parental expectations may exacerbate anxiety, as students fear disappointing their families.

Research question two: What is the frequency of school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of school library use (N = 384)

School library use	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I often visit the school library	2.9	1.14	Moderate
I read the books in the library	3.09	0.07	Moderate
I use the library only during library periods	3.11	1.01	Moderate
I always ask the librarian for help when I need one	2.14	0.96	Low

School library use	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I use the library for book club	2.89	1.10	Moderate
I use the library for technology training	3.07	1.01	Moderate
I use the children magazines in the library	2.74	1.07	Moderate
I am allowed to borrow books from the library to use at home	1.99	0.98	Low
Overall school library use	2.87	0.92	Moderate

The overall mean school library use score ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.98$) indicates "moderate use." The highest score shows "I use the library only during library periods" ($M = 3.11$), and it falls under the moderate range. The lowest range falls under "I am allowed to borrow books ($M = 1.99$), or I ask the librarian for help when I need it" ($M = 2.14$).

School library use in private schools is moderate (overall $M = 2.87$) given that private schools are presumed to have better library facilities. This finding validates Oyewusi and Oyeboade (2021), who reported moderate use in some private schools. However, it supports Ugwu and Eze (2020) in that even when libraries exist, students may not use them if anxiety or other affective barriers are present. The lowest indicators, which are borrowing books (1.99) and consulting the librarians, suggest that students either lack the skills to use the library effectively or that the librarians are not available to guide the students.

Research question three: Is there a significant relationship between reading anxiety and school library use among private secondary school students in Abia State?

Table 3: Pearson correlation between reading anxiety and school library use (N = 376)

Variable	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Reading anxiety	38.9	5.6	-0.48	0.002	Significant
School library use	1.85	0.65			

There is a moderate, negative, and statistically significant relationship between reading anxiety and school library use ($r = -0.48$, $p = 0.002$). As reading anxiety increases, school library use tends to decrease.

The negative correlation ($r = -0.48$) is consistent with the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) and with empirical studies such as Aydın and Yıldız (2019). The magnitude (moderate) indicates that while reading anxiety is an important predictor of library use, other factors (e.g., library ambience, peer influence, and time constraints) also play roles. The relationship is significant, meaning that reducing reading anxiety could lead to increased library use and vice versa, suggesting a reciprocal, reinforcing cycle.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. For school owners and principals: Implement school-wide reading anxiety reduction programs, including peer reading groups, reading mentorship, and non-graded reading challenges.
2. For librarians: Transform the library into a “safe space” by training staff in anxiety-sensitive practices, creating cozy reading corners, and organizing book clubs with low-stakes participation.
3. For teachers: Integrate sustained silent reading (SSR) into the daily timetable, allowing students to read self-selected materials without assessment pressure.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the often-overlooked psychological dimension of academic life, reading anxiety and its complex relationship with the utilization of school libraries among private secondary school students in Abia State. What emerged from the findings is a portrait of quiet struggle, one in which the very tool designed to foster intellectual growth becomes a source of apprehension and avoidance.

The research reveals that reading anxiety is a prevalent issue within this population, rather than a fringe phenomenon. A striking majority of students reported experiencing moderate to high levels of unease, tension, and even dread when confronted with reading tasks. This is not merely a fleeting discomfort before an examination; rather, it is a persistent emotional undercurrent that colours their academic engagement, saps their confidence, and subtly erodes their motivation to explore texts independently.

Equally telling is the second finding: school library usage among these students is moderate and low in the critical areas of borrowing books and consulting the librarian. While students may occasionally visit the library to study or complete assignments in isolation, the deeper, more transformative practices such as selecting leisure reading materials, asking for research assistance, or engaging in collaborative inquiry are conspicuously absent. This pattern suggests that the school libraries, though physically present and potentially well-resourced, need the services of professional librarians who will be available and accessible to the students and also motivate them to borrow and read books at their leisure.

The third and most analytically significant conclusion draws these two threads together: a statistically significant negative relationship exists between reading anxiety and library use. In simple terms, students who feel more anxious about reading tend to visit the library less often. This inverse correlation is not coincidental; it points to a vicious cycle in which anxiety discourages library visits, and the resulting lack of exposure to diverse reading materials and supportive interactions further entrenches that anxiety.

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