

**SELECTED VARIABLES INFLUENCING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH WRITING IN UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigated selected variables influencing undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing in Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. Four research questions and three hypotheses tested at 0.05 alpha level guided the study. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. A sample of 561 final year undergraduate students was drawn from the population through stratified random sampling technique based on the six departments of the Faculty. The four instruments used for data collection were Research self-concept Scale (RSS); Research Anxiety Scale (RAS), Research Achievement Motivation Scale (RAMS) and Research Attitude Questionnaire (RAQ). These were validated by experts in Educational Psychology, measurement and evaluation. The reliability coefficients of RSS, RAS, RAMS and RAQ were 0.72, 0.69, 0.81 and 0.76 respectively which were determined through Cronbach Alpha technique for internal consistency of the instruments. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test of independent sample means. The results revealed that self-concept, research anxiety and achievement motivation significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing. Based on these results, recommendations were made including that school guidance counselors should endeavour to counsel students with low self-concept, low achievement motivation and high anxiety pertaining their academic progress especially in educational research writing.*

**KEYWORDS:** Attitude, Education, Research Writing, Self-Concept, Anxiety, Achievement Motivation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The need to study factors that influence Students' attitude towards educational research (project) writing cannot be overemphasized. This is because of the importance of research in national development and progress. Presently, the level of students' attitude in educational research writing is below expectation (Ibe, 2008 & Ogomaka 2004). In all higher institutions, no student graduates without being subjected to undertake some research and present the findings of such research. Research is the process of investigating a problem in order to find solution to it. Paneerselvan (2010 p2) defined research as:

*An organized set of activities to study and develop a model or procedure/technique to find the results of a realistic problem supported by literature and data such that its objective(s) is (are) optimized and further make recommendations/inferences for implementations.*

Koul (2007) defined research as a systematic attempt to obtain answers to meaningful questions about phenomena or events through the application of scientific procedures. The main aim of

research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered yet. Research has become a recognized discipline in Education. Educational research refers to a systematic attempt to gain a better understanding of the educational process generally with a view to improving its efficiency. Nworgu (2006) defined educational research as systematic approach to the solution of educational problems, which involves the application of scientific methods in finding solutions to educational problems. Umoinyang (2014) states that educational research seeks to find the relationship among educational variables as a whole, to explain behavioural changes in education, to predict and control the activity of educational system. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006) defined educational research as the application of the scientific approach to the study of educational problems. It is the way in which people acquire dependable and useful information about the educative process.

One of the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education is to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training (FRN 2008). Tertiary institutions are expected to pursue this as well as other goals through teaching, research and development (FRN, 2008). Moreover, in the National Policy on Education, the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that University research shall be relevant to the nation's developmental goals. Students from tertiary institutions are expected to undertake projects, dissertations or theses at the final year of their programme which is a pre-requisite for their graduation. The funny part of it is that many students do not take their conduct of research serious instead they depend on duplicating what others have done before whether correct or incorrect. Olatunji and Olatunji (2008), investigated on assessment of first degree research projects in the Faculty of Education, Abia State University (2003-2008) and found out that 12.1% of the same research topic of all the 454 research projects were re-submitted to the same or other supervisors.

To the researchers best knowledge, students at the undergraduate level usually tend to view educational research (project) writing negatively. Usually, the way research methods is presented in the classroom and the way it is perceived by students has a lot to do with students' attitude and behaviour towards research writing (project). One of the most important reasons for nurturing a positive attitude towards educational research writing is that it may increase one's tendency to answer many educational research problems, and prepare one for related challenges in his or her subsequent career. But, attitude (whether positive or negative) cannot just happen but is moderated by certain factors or variables such as self-concept, gender, anxiety, teacher-student relationship motivation and others. Attitude is a complex psychological construct that play an essential role in the explanation of behaviour. Ukwuije and Opara (2012) defined attitude as behavioural predispositions that describe a person's tendency to perform certain classes of responses towards specified class of stimuli which can either be persons, ideas or objects. The attitude can be positive or negative. Therefore, research attitude could be positive or negative, strong or weak. Opie cited in Opie, Asim and Joshua (2015), reported that undergraduate students' attitude toward research in the University of Calabar was not statistically significant for a meaningful conduct of research. The study revealed that students manifest a weak but positive attitude toward research. Certain factors can influence the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing such as self-concept, research anxiety and achievement motivation.

Self-concept is a cognitive structure- a belief about who you are. Opara (2012) posited that self-concept is one of the component entities individuals are made up of. It endures throughout one's life and contributes in guiding one's behaviour at different occasions and at different

times. Nwankwo (2010) sees self-concept as the understanding you have about yourself or what you believe about yourself. Weiten and Llyod (2003) defined self-concept as a collection of beliefs about one's own nature, unique, qualities and typical behaviour. Research self-concept is a construct based upon individual self-perceptions of research abilities and interest, perception of those abilities in relation to other domains as well as in relation to other people. A student's concept of himself or herself as a researcher may influence his or her attitude towards research writing.

Research anxiety may also influence students' attitude towards educational research writing. Anxiety is an emotional component of human beings that manifest itself in life endeavours in form of worry and restlessness. Ramalingam (2006) defined anxiety as an emotional state arising in situations of worry, nervousness and manifest in expectation for unfavourable events. When this kind of emotional state is associated with research (project) writing, it is regarded as research anxiety. Research anxiety is an experience which expresses itself in students' minds and behaviours in form of fear of failure, negative self-evaluation in relation to one's estimate of how others are doing, negative prediction of what will be the outcome of a research (project) etc. Higgins and Kotrlik (2006) defined research anxiety as the characteristics which a student perceives as discomforting, to the extent that productivity may be reduced. Research anxiety is the tension, fear, stress, difficulties in understanding research. Research anxiety can also be seen as psychological state of mind of a student about a research as expressed by the level of worry, fear, uncertainty, concern and helplessness expressed before, during or even after research writing.

Achievement motivation can be seen as that type of motivation geared towards the achievement of a specific goal, thus bringing to bear all the individual's resources. Opara and Agbakwuru (2014) defined academic achievement motivation of the students as their willingness to strive to succeed at challenging tasks and meet high standards of accomplishment. Gesinde (2000) opined that academic achievement motivation could be seen as self determination to succeed in academic work. Wigfield and Eccles, (2002) defined academic achievement motivation as a person's or student's desire regarding academic subjects when the students competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence. The urge to achieve varies from one individual to the other. For some individuals, the need for achievement is very high and for others it may be very low.

It is common knowledge that many research analysts and students' supervisors have been alleging that the quality of research writing or report in Nigeria's tertiary institutions is very poor. Many of the students are not interested in project research writing, instead, they bent down in doubling what others have done. In support of this allegation, Olatunji and Olatunji (2008), reported that 55 projects which was 12.1% of the total research projects of 454 undergraduates were resubmitted to the same supervisors or other supervisors by other students who are not the original authors of the research projects. Hence, the researchers deemed it necessary to find out the extent certain factors such as self-concept, research anxiety and achievement motivation influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research (project) writing. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the proportion of students who have positive and negative attitude toward educational research writing?
2. To what extent does self-concept influence the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing?

3. To what extent does research anxiety influence the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing?
4. To what extent does achievement motivation influence the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing?

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance were also formulated and tested.

1. Self-concept does not significantly influence the attitude of undergraduate students' toward educational research writing.
2. Research anxiety does not significantly influence the attitude of undergraduate students' toward educational research writing.
3. Achievement motivation does not significantly influence the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing.

## **METHOD**

The study adopted an ex-post facto design. The population of the study comprised of final year undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. A sample of 561 (49% of the population) final year undergraduate students was drawn from the population of 1150 final year undergraduate students 2015/2016 session (Source: Statistical department of Faculty of Education Uniport) through stratified random sampling technique based on the six departments of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling (EDP), Educational Management (EDM), Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology (EDC), Educational Foundations (EDF), Human Kinetics and Health Education (HKT) and Adult and Non-formal Education (DAE) of the Faculty. Four instruments titled Research Self-concept Scale (RSS), Research Anxiety Scale (RAS), Research Achievement Motivation Scale (RAMS) and Research Attitude Questionnaire (RAQ) which were developed by the researchers were used for data collection. The instruments (RSS, RAS, and RAMS) contained 10 items each while RAQ has 20 items. The students were asked to respond to each of the items on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) which weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Based on the assigned weights, the total scores of each respondent were obtained for each instrument by adding the scores for all the items. For the fact that RSS, RAS and RAMS instruments contained ten (10) items each with a four-point scale, the maximum score for each instrument was 40 while the minimum score was 10. Before the analysis, the mean scores of RSS, RAS and RAMS were used to determine high and low respectively. Those students with the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 25 and above are for high and those below mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 25 are for low. The mean score of RAQ was used to determine positive and negative attitude respectively. Those students with the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 50 and above are for positive attitude and those below mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 50 are for negative attitude. The RSS, RAS, RAMS and RAQ were validated by experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation based on face validity. The reliability coefficients of the instruments (RSS, RAS, RAMS and RAQ) were determined through Cronbach Alpha technique for internal consistency. The reliability coefficients obtained were 0.72, 0.69, 0.81

and 0.76 respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test of two sample means was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

## RESULTS

The results of the data analysis are shown in the tables below.

**Research question 1:** What is the proportion of students who have positive and negative attitude toward educational research writing?

In order to answer the research question, data collected were used to determine the proportion of students who have positive and negative attitude toward educational research writing. To achieve this, percentage was used to determine those with positive and negative attitude.

**Table 1:** Distribution of students based on their research attitude ratings

Research Attitude	Number of students	Percentage
Positive	244	44.3
Negative	307	55.7
Total	551	100

Table 1 shows that 244 students representing 44.3% of the students had positive attitude toward educational research writing while 307 students representing 55.7% of the students had negative attitude toward educational research writing. This implies that students with negative attitude toward educational research writing are more than those with positive attitude.

**Research question 2:** To what extent does self-concept influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing?

**Hypothesis 1:** Self-concept does not significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing.

In order to answer the research question, data collected were used to determine the extent self-concept influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing. To achieve this, mean and standard deviation were used while t-test of independent sample mean was used to test the hypothesis

**Table 2:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of influence of self-concept on students' attitude toward educational research writing.

Self-concept	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
High	249	51.06	7.86				
Low	312	45.09	9.96	559	7.72	1.96	Significant

\* Significant level 0.05

Table 2 shows that students with high self-concept had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 51.06 and a standard deviation of 7.86 while students with low self-concept had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 45.09 and a standard deviation of 9.96. This reveals that students with high self-concept had positive attitude toward educational research writing than those with low self-concept. When the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores were subjected to t-test analysis, a calculated t-value of 7.72 was obtained. The result of the analysis reveals that t-calculated of 7.72 obtained was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 559 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected implying that self-concept significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing.

**Research question 3:** To what extent does research anxiety influence undergraduate students attitude toward educational research writing?

**Hypothesis 2:** Research anxiety does not significantly influence undergraduate students attitude toward educational research writing.

In order to answer the research question, data collected were used to determine the extent research anxiety influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing. To achieve this, mean and standard deviation were used while t-test of independent sample mean was used to test the hypothesis.

**Table 3:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of influence of research anxiety on students' attitude toward educational research writing.

Anxiety	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
High	345	45.76	9.74				
Low	206	51.15	8.20	559	6.68	1.96	Significant

\* Significant level 0.05

Table 3 reveals that students with high research anxiety had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 45.76 and standard deviation of 9.74 while students with low research anxiety had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 51.15 and standard deviation of 8.20. This shows that students with high research anxiety had negative attitude toward educational research writing while those with low research anxiety had positive attitude. The data were further subjected to t-test analysis and the result indicates that t-calculated of 6.68 obtained was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 559 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that research anxiety significantly influence undergraduate students attitude toward educational research writing.

**Research question 4:** To what extent does achievement motivation influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing?

**Hypothesis 3:** Achievement motivation does not significantly influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing.

In order to answer the research question, data collected were used to determine the extent achievement motivation influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational

research writing. To achieve this, mean and standard deviation were used while t-test of independent sample mean was used to test the hypothesis.

**Table 4:** Mean rating, standard deviation and t-test analysis of influence of achievement motivation on students' attitude toward educational research writing.

Achievement motivation	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Result
High	296	50.02	8.63	559	6.18	1.96	Significant
Low	255	45.19	9.90				

\* Significant level 0.05

Table 4 indicates that students with high achievement motivation had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 50.02 and standard deviation of 8.63 while students with low achievement motivation had research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 45.19 and standard deviation of 9.90. This reveals that students with high achievement motivation had positive attitude toward educational research writing while those with low achievement motivation had negative attitude. The data were further subjected to t-test analysis and the result shows that t-calculated of 6.18 obtained was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 559 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that achievement motivation significantly influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the study shows that students with negative attitude toward educational research writing are more than those with positive attitude. Fifty-six percentage (56%) of the students had negative attitude toward educational research writing while only 44% had positive attitude. This implies that majority of the students have no interest in educational research writing in the sense that some of the project written by them are so badly done. In higher institutions, students perceived research writing as difficult and unexciting. The findings of the study is in agreement with Opie cited in Opie, Asim and Joshua (2015) who found out that undergraduate students' attitude toward research in the University of Calabar was not statistically significant for a meaningful conduct of research.

The result of this study also reveals that self-concept significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing. Research attitude mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of 51.06 and 45.09 for students of high and low self-concept were respectively obtained. This shows that students with high self-concept had positive attitude toward educational research writing than those with low self-concept. It was also observed that the t-calculated value of 7.72 was greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom (df) of 559. This implies that self-concept significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing. This is in agreement with Rezaei and Zamani-Miandashiti (2013) who investigated on the relationship between research self-efficacy, research anxiety and attitude toward research and found out that students had higher levels of research self-efficacy. That there was a positive significant relationship between attitude toward research and students' research self-efficacy. Bieschke (2006) stated that research self-efficacy is judgements about one's ability to perform specific research. This means that students with more positive attitude toward research are more confident in their ability to conduct research.

Again, the result shows that research anxiety significantly influence undergraduate students attitude toward educational research writing. The mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of 45.76 and 51.15 for high and low anxious undergraduate students were respectively obtained. This reveals that students with high research anxiety had negative attitude toward educational research writing while those with low research anxiety had positive attitude. It also reveals that the t-calculated value of 6.68 was greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 559 degree of freedom. This implies that research anxiety significantly influence undergraduate students attitude toward educational research writing. When an individual has high anxiety that is, tension, fear, stress it will reduce the productivity in any area including educational research writing.

Finally, the result reveals that achievement motivation significantly influences the attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing. The mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of 50.02 and 45.19 for high and low achievement motivated undergraduate students were respectively obtained. This reveals that students with high achievement motivation had positive attitude toward educational research writing while those with low achievement motivation had negative attitude. It also indicates that the t-calculated value of 6.18 was greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 559 degree of freedom. This implies that achievement motivation significantly influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing. Achievement motivated people prefer to work on a problem rather than leave the outcome to chance.

## CONCLUSION

From the result of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. Self-concept significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing.
2. Research anxiety significantly influence attitude of undergraduate students toward educational research writing.
3. Achievement motivation significantly influence undergraduate students' attitude toward educational research writing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

1. Students who have low self-concept should be re-oriented before they start any educational research project.
2. The high research anxious undergraduate students should be enlightened more on the rudiments of educational research writing by their lecturers.

3. Students with low achievement motivation should be advised to develop high achievement motivation especially in educational research writing which will help them in attainment of excellence or success.
4. School guidance counsellors should endeavour to counsel students with low self-concept, low achievement motivation and high anxiety pertaining their academic progress especially in educational research writing.

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