

## Suicidal Ideation Among University Freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria: Prevailing Role of Learning Anxiety, Depression and Academic Failure

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### Abstract

This study investigated suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria: Prevailing role of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure. This study adopted descriptive survey research design of ex-post facto-type. The population comprised of 96 fresh undergraduates (49 male 51.04% and 47 female 48.96%) in 100 level transiting to 200 level who expressed suicidal thoughts and sought counselling intervention service from the university counselling service center. Three research questions were answered and three hypotheses tested. Four standardized instruments were used for data collection and analysed using Percentage, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Result shows that significant negative predictive relationship exists between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety ( $R=0. -0.43$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), depression ( $R=0. -0.51$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and academic failure ( $R=0. -0.55$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Academic failure made the highest relative contribution on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria ( $\beta= -0.117$ ) followed by depression ( $\beta= -0.051$ ) and learning anxiety ( $\beta= -0.043$ ). Also, the prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria is 50.57% for male and 49.43% for female. It was recommended that Students should be given adequate orientation of the benefit of utilizing counselling services as a means for them to overcome their learning anxiety, depressive experience and academic failure in the course of their scholarship.

**Keywords:** Academic Failure; Depression; Freshers; Learning Anxiety; Suicidal Ideation; University

### 1. Introduction

Navigating the multicomplex demands associated with independently studying to attain university education in Nigeria by freshers is often a major challenging developmental milestone as they embark on the path of responsibility and self-discovery. It is a common knowledge that the Nigerian university system is one fraught with complex problems that plague everyone that relies on it from students to academic staff and by extension, the entire country. The university learning environment for most freshers, serves as their first heaven to feel the taste of freedom and independence from strict monitoring of parents and related guardians. However, literature has documented that this new found freedom, when not wisely handled, has often led to freshers committing mistakes that can directly affect their psycho-socio-emotional stability, physical and mental health, academic success and character development. For example, Olaseni et al (2022) stated that when some freshers fail to adjust to new university learning environment due to excessive academic workload, loneliness, irregular feeding, poor sleep, family expectation induced stress, peer pressure, and bullying; they may express sense of worthlessness, dejection, uncertainty about their future, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

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Furthermore, Olaseni et al (2022) posit that among Nigerian youths' suicidal ideation and suicide occurrence has become a fundamental issue of concern and a vital mental health challenge affecting their intellectual growth and general developmental lifespan. Also, Zhang et al (2019) affirmed that suicide is the most prominent mental health challenges among individuals within the ages of 15-34 years. It is noteworthy that the common associated terms with suicide include suicide behaviour, suicide ideation, suicide plans, attempts and completed suicide (WHO, 2021). This context has often raised serious concern in recent years, particularly within tertiary institutions where students are exposed to a variety of stressors. As observed by Nwosu and Eze (2021) in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria students contend with academic demands, financial pressure, fear of failure, poor time management, social adjustment difficulties, and minimal access to psychological support services. These factors are major stressors that can ignite the feeling of suicidal ideation and possible suicide attempt.

Suicidal ideation refers to contemplations, feelings, or obsessions to end one's own life. It epitomizes a life-threatening mental health concern and is often an antecedent to suicide attempts and completed suicides. Suicidal ideation can range from momentary thoughts about death to detailed planning of suicide, and it is typically associated with devastating psychological distress, depression, and anxiety. Suicidal ideation can be defined as having feelings of committing suicide (Nock et al., 2022). Suicidal ideation is an important predictor of suicide attempts and it ignites other mental health problems among youths (Nock et al., 2022). The World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15–29-year olds worldwide, constituting a major public health problem (WHO, 2019).

Although the occurrence of suicidal ideation and suicide are largely underreported due to socio-cultural, religious, and legal stigma in Nigeria, available data suggest that it is on the rise. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that about 700,000 people die by suicide each year globally, and suicide remains the fourth leading cause of death among young people. Local studies also reveal that many Nigerian students experience suicidal ideation but are reluctant to seek help due to fear of being labeled as weak or mentally unstable (Olawale & Umeh, 2020). Among students aspiring to attain formal education and professional career development within university communities in Nigeria, informal accounts and internal counselling records indicate increasing cases of emotional breakdowns, academic disengagement due to psychological distress, maladjustment and career disorientation. Yet, no known empirical study has comprehensively examined the link between learning anxiety, depression, academic failure and suicidal ideation within the student population of Nigerian institution of learning. This is despite the fact that appropriate information of the occurrence of this incidence would create opportunity for early counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions. Therefore, the focus of this study is to fill this vital research gap by investigating suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria: Prevailing role of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure.

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## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Interpersonal theory of suicide propounded by Joiner Thomas in 2005 tries to clarify why people get involved in suicidal act and to categorize people who are suicidal-at-risk. Joiner Thomas projected this context in his book titled: Why people die by suicide (Joiner, 2005). Interpersonal theory of suicide comprises of three distinct mechanisms that can propel people to attempt suicide. The propositions of interpersonal theory of suicide affirmed that the concurrent feelings of lack of sense of belongingness and apparent burdensomeness can ignite the desire for people to commit suicide. However, Joiner Thomas stated that these two factors (belongingness and burdensomeness) cannot on their own make people commit suicide without them having the acquired capability (that is, the acquired ability) to overcome one's natural fear of death. When people feel they are disconnected from the real world, they become self-isolated, dejected, depressed and irrationally overwhelmed with the sadness of failure and urge to end it. At this point of despair, affected individuals see their self as an object of burden to other people and in their resolve not be a source of burden to others, they contemplate committing suicide. For example, university undergraduate that has consistently recorded failure and without basic orientation as regards where to seek for help may renege in the sense of helplessness and hopelessness to acquire the courage to put an end to their life via suicide. For example, as at May 2019 Punch Newspaper reported that a 300-level medical student of Niger Delta University (NDU), Ammasoma in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria committed suicide due to repeated failure in his examination. PUNCH Metro gathered that the student, identified as Uzakah Ebiweni, dove into the Amassoma River and drowned before he could get help. Uzakah Ebiweni, a student of Surgery and Medicine at the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences of the NDU, decided to kill himself following his failure to realise his dream. Sources at the university said few hours after Ebiweni's body was recovered, another student attempted to kill himself by running into a fast-moving motorcycle was rescued by other students. In June 2025, A 400-level Computer Science student of Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State Nigeria, Joshua

Lawson, reportedly killed himself after being given a year suspension by university management having being found guilty of examination malpractice (Punch Newspaper Report, 2026). This primary data indicates an increasing rate of suicide among undergraduates in Nigeria mostly likely due to irrational feelings of lack of sense of belongingness and burdensomeness and capacity to carry out suicide as final straw to put an end to their life of despair. This makes the theoretical postulations of interpersonal theory of suicide applicable to this study.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation, or suicidal thoughts, is the feelings of an individual contemplating of the likelihood to die by suicide (WHO 2020). Suicidal ideation is an indication of a person expressing mental disorder or under the influence of abused psychoactive drugs and can also occur due to post-traumatic-stress in response to adverse life circumstances without the existence of a mental disorder (Barry, 2019). The ICD-11 describes suicidal ideation as feelings, notions, or reflections about the likelihood of ending one's life, ranging from thinking that one would be better off dead to construction of elaborate plans (WHO, 2020). The DSM-5 defines it as thoughts about self-harm, with deliberate contemplation or planning of possible procedures that can be applied to cause one's own death (WHO, 2020).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define suicidal ideation as thinking about, feeling, or scheduling suicide act (Klonsky et al., 2016). Ideation often occurs with the general intense feelings of desiring to die without any tangible process of plan, intention, or action and progressing to active suicidal ideation, which involves a detailed plan and a determined intent to act on the ideas. Suicidal ideation is closely connected with both suicidal attempts and deaths, serving as a substantial risk factor for future suicide attempts. Suicidal ideation is often viewed as a single concept, whereas passive thinking, active planning, and actual behaviour are seen as an incessant spectrum (Jobes & Joiner, 2019). Suicidal ideation refers to thoughts, considerations, or planning related to suicide. It is a serious mental health Projecting Nigerian university context, Olawale and Umeh (2020) associated the occurrence of suicidal ideation and suicide with persistent academic failure, socio-personal and emotional trauma, family stressor, and mental health challenges. Suicidal ideation often occurs due to expressed feelings of hopelessness, dejection, or academic disenchantments or social isolation. Early detection and intervention are crucial for prevention.

#### 3.2. Learning Anxiety and Suicidal Ideation

According to the report of Bolton et al (2018) feelings of committing suicide were noted by a psychiatrist in nearly 30 % of people with learning anxiety disorder, compared to 7 % in those without such disorder. Learning anxiety disorder, substance abuse, personality disorder, affective disorder and psychotic disorders are documented risk factors linked with suicide ideation (Bolton et al., 2018). Notably, learning anxiety disorder have a 10 times increased risk to ignite suicide attempt (Bolton, et al, 2018). The relationship between learning anxiety disorders, especially panic disorder, and suicidal ideation behaviour has been established in the literature (Vickers & McNally, 2014). Learning anxiety disorder have consistently been linked with an increase in suicidal behaviour in cross-sectional university learning community and clinical studies (Vickers & McNally, 2014). There are also, however, high levels of comorbidity found within learning anxiety disorders. One point of contention is whether it is this comorbidity, and not simply the presence of learning anxiety disorder, that is associated with increased suicidal behaviour (Bolton, et al, 2018). Using data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions Wave 2 (NESARC II) (Bolton, et al, 2018) hypothesized that learning anxiety disorder will be connected with suicidal ideation even after adjusting for all mental disorders assessed in their survey, including personality disorders which is noted to likely account for a portion of this relationship. Anusiem and Okoiye (2015); Akingbade, Adebisi and Okoiye (2022) stated that learning anxiety disorder is documented in literature as a significant trigger of negative emotions that hinder learners' academic performance, developmental wellbeing and quality of life. Also, learning anxiety often make learners experience emotional, psychological and intellectual maladjustment.

Chiu et al., (2021) established that learning anxiety disorder and suicidal ideation characteristically develops in adolescence due to poor social intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning (Chiu et al., 2021), poorer academic attainment (Leigh et al., 2023), and depressive symptoms. A meta-analysis found that learning anxiety disorder diagnosis significantly predicts suicidal ideation among students (Bentley et al., 2016). A systematic review and meta-analysis found evidence of a strong association between learning anxiety and suicidal ideation in young student (Leigh et al., 2023). Also, Okoiye and Okoiye (2025) reports that consistent expression of learning anxiety by students often result to failure in academic task and if left unchecked would always ignite persistent feelings of fear to engage in classroom learning activities, restlessness, nervousness and suicidal thought. Using a clinical sample of in-school adolescents aged 12–15 years recruited in the US, Gallagher et al. (2024) found evidence of a significant positive

correlation between baseline learning anxiety and 18-month suicidal ideation ( $r = 0.32$ ). Furthermore, they found a significantly indirect effect from baseline learning anxiety symptoms to 18-month suicidal ideation through loneliness, hopelessness, even after adjusting for sex, number of psychiatric diagnoses, baseline depression symptoms, and baseline suicidal ideation. Their findings suggest that learning anxiety may be a specific factor that confers vulnerability to suicidality. Okoiye and Falaye (2011); Okoiye, Ukah and Nwoga (2013) established that learning anxiety can potentially ignite high levels of psycho-emotional distress and academic failure in affected students because it interferes with the appropriate functioning of their cognitive sense of being.

### 3.3. Depression and Suicidal Ideation

Kessler et al., (2005) Studies established a strong association between depression and suicidal ideation. Depressive condition can impair students' ability to solve problems evolving from their life experience, coping mechanisms and make them vulnerable to suicidal thoughts (Kessler et al., 2005). A study by Afolabi et al. (2018) found that high depressive students were four times more likely to report suicidal ideation than those without. They further affirmed that depression typically projects depressive mood or disorder and connotes persistent feeling of loss of interest in normal life activities, expressed sadness over things that normally excites people, and negative feelings towards interpersonal relationship and blunt dissatisfaction with life generally.

Avenevoli et al (2015) posit that depression is one of the most common psychological problems that negatively affect the individual, such as reduction in daily life activities and professional work, loss of productivity, financial difficulties, and damage to interpersonal relationships or marriages and suicidal attempt. They further reported that depression is considered a crucial public health concern that has significant impact on individuals and society. Ulutas and Ergin (2019) study found that the most serious consequence of depression is suicide. Approximately 800,000 suicide cases per year are associated with depression. 60–70% of those who commit suicide are patients with significant depression in their past. Depression is associated not only with completed suicides but also with suicide attempts. As the mental health challenges associated with of depression increases, the seriousness of suicide attempt and intent to die also increase (Ulutas & Ergin, 2019).

### 3.4. Academic Failure and Suicidal Ideation

Kamal and Bener (2009) stated that academic failure is associated with students' inability to excel in their academic learning task based on repeated failure. The consequences of this can be dropping out of school, developing mental health challenges, attempting committing suicide or committing actual suicide itself. Zhu (2024) averred that academic failure occurs when a student fails to attain the basic standard outcome in an academic task engagement resulting to poor academic performance, class or course repetition, behaviour maladjustment, dropout or suicidal thought. Erhun, Jegede and Ojelabi (2022) conducted a study among pharmacy students at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria to determine the consequences of academic failure on the behavioural dispositions of students who have repeated a class. They focused on assessing the emotional implications and psychosociological impact of academic failure among 177 pharmacy students from 200 to 500 levels who have repeated at least one class in their programme. Questionnaire was used to information and their findings revealed that the most prevailing negative emotions expressed by pharmacy students who had repeated a class included boredom (61%), anxiety (61%), anger (77.4%), shame (80%) and suicidal ideation (81%) because they feel their career and professional dream can come to an end if the university as them to withdraw due to repeated academic failure. Their experience equally impacted negatively on their readiness to learn, irregular class attendance and preparation for test.

Expressed suicidal behaviour among university students in Nigeria due to academic underachievement is becoming an issue of significant national concern. This is because the increasing prevalence of suicide act among university students mortgages the future human capital and national economic development. According to Adewuya et al (2016); Oyetunji et al (2021) and Sonia (2020) propensities of suicidal act is becoming prevalent among students in Nigerian universities. This includes desire to commit suicide and expression of suicidal behaviours as well as other anti-social risk behaviours such as poisoning, hanging and drug abuse due to inability to cope with academic rigors and experience of consistent academic failures in examinations. Simon et al (2007) stated that university students often express suicidal ideation due to their experience with academic maladjustment and dissatisfaction with poor academic performance that serves as key life stressor. Pillay (2021) recounts that globally, an average of 32.7% college students express suicidal ideation when they are academically disillusioned. Also, 1.3% to 1.5% university students attempt suicide and 6.4% to 9.5% really contemplate suicide by the end of each academic year (Pillay, 2021). The outcome of a study conducted in South Africa by Pillay (2021) revealed that 46.4% of students studying in university expressed suicidal ideation, 26.5% planned suicide, and 8.6% attempted suicide. Abdu et al (2019) study in Ethiopian on suicidal ideation and associated factors among university students found that the prevalence of suicidal ideation, plan, and an attempt ranges from 58.3%, 37.3%, and 4.4%, respectively, and suicide is the key cause of death among university students and it serves as

a life-threatening challenge in schools across board. Poor performing students at the risk of repeated academic failure are at-risk of dropping out of school and suicidal ideation (Daniel et al., 2006). Literature documents that suicidal ideation is grossly associated with academic failure and truancy (Epstein et al., 2019) and repeating of failed coursework (Kosidou et al., 2014). Studies report that students struggling to attain writing and reading competence are at greater risk of expressing suicidal ideation (Daniel et al., 2006).

### 3.5. Statement of the Problem

Globally, the frequent occurrence of suicide ignited by suicidal ideation among students in institutions of higher learning and specifically in Nigeria, is taking unprecedented devastating dimension and becoming a serious public health concern. Over the years, Nigerian university learning community has consistently been experiencing students committing suicide due to either personal-social problems, financial difficulties, emotional challenges, family conflict, poor academic performance, etc. for example, of recent, on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2025, Punch Newspaper in Nigeria reported the case of a 200-level medical student Ajibola Ibitayo, with the matriculation number: DEN/2021/023) who reportedly committed suicide after failing medical exam twice. This student has previously repeated same level (Punch Newspaper Report 2025). In December 2025, a Nigerian Law School student, Ayomiposi Ojajuni, reportedly died by suicide after he was barred from writing the Bar Final examinations in Yola due to failure in some of the previous core courses he sat for and needed to retake and pass them before proceeding to take the final Bar examination (Punch Newspaper Report 2026). These incidents showcase the intensity of suicidal ideation as igniting mechanism for suicide act. This disturbing development gives credence to previous report of World Health Organization (WHO) in 2024 that in Nigeria, available statistical data revealed that among youths' aged 15-35, suicide occurrence is becoming a devastating issue of concern because in Nigeria the rate of suicide prevalence is estimated at 17.3 per 100,000 which is quite higher than the African and global prevalence rate of 12.0 per 100,000, and 10.5 per 100,000 respectively. This calls for concern and conduct of this present study.

### 3.6. Rational for the Study

Presently, the frequency of occurrence of suicide in Nigeria is quite distressing and has compounding negative effect on the mental health orientation of the society at large. Therefore, systemic information on suicidal ideation as an enabler for suicidal act can facilitate societal discourse on the need for instituting intervention mechanism for prevention, effective treatment and helping people develop creative coping ability to manage challenges that can induce suicidal thought and desire to commit suicide.

### 3.7. Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria: Prevailing role of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure and to specifically:

- Determine if relationship exist between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety, depression and academic failure
- Predict the relative contribution of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
- Find out the prevalence rate of suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria base on (learning anxiety, depression and academic failure) factors.

### 3.8. Research Questions

- What relationship exist between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety, depression and academic failure
- What is the predictive relative contribution of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
- What is the prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria base on (learning anxiety, depression and academic failure) factors.

### 3.9. Research Hypotheses

- Learning anxiety will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
- Depression will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

- Academic failure will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of ex-post facto-type. With this design, We the researchers do not have manipulable control over research issues been investigated because the incidence has already occurred. The population comprised of 96 fresh undergraduates comprising of 49 male (51.04%) and 47 female (48.96%) in 100 level transiting to 200 level who expressed suicidal thoughts and sought counselling intervention service from the university counselling service center. 32 each were purposively selected for the study from three purposively selected universities in Owerri Imo State, Nigeria.

### 4.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be fresh undergraduate of 100 level transiting to 200 level studying in the three selected universities in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria
- Participants must be fresh undergraduate of 100 level transiting to 200 level studying in the three selected universities who had sought counselling intervention service concerning their suicidal ideation challenges
- Participants must be fresh undergraduate of 100 level transiting to 200 level studying in the three selected universities who had sought counselling intervention service concerning their suicidal ideation challenges and willing to participate in the study.

### 4.3. Instrumentation

- **Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale (SIDAS)** by Van Spijker et al (2014) is designed to screen people to determine if they express suicidal thoughts and assess the severity of these thoughts. It consists of five items, each targeting an attribute of suicidal thoughts: level of distress associated with the thoughts, impact on daily functioning, frequency, controllability and closeness to attempt suicide. Responses are measured on a 3-point scale. Items are coded so that a higher total score reflects more severe suicidal thoughts. The SIDAS had high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.91).
- **Academic Anxiety Scale** by Cassady (2020) was used to measure impact of learning anxiety on suicidal ideation of fresh undergraduates used for the study. It has 11 item and a 4-point Likert Scale response pattern of 1 (Not at all typical of me) to 4 very typical of me). The attainable scores range from 11-14 (Not Having Learning Anxious); 15-20 (Mild Learning Anxiety) 21 – 29 (Moderate Learning Anxiety) and 30 – 44 (High Learning Anxiety). It has Cronbach's Alfa reliability coefficient of 0.87
- **The Beck Depression Inventory-II** (Beck et al, 1996) is a 21-item self-report inventory used to measure the level of severity of depression associated with fresh undergraduates' suicidal ideation used for the study. The items projects DSMIV criteria for depression. For example, individuals are asked to respond to each question based on a two-week time period rather than the one-week timeframe on the BDI. The high reliability and validity of Beck Depression Inventory-II is attested to across diverse populations and cultural entities. It has Cronbach's Alfa reliability coefficient of 0.83
- **Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory** by Conroy et al (2002) was used to measure impact of academic Failure on suicidal ideation of fresh undergraduates used for the study. It is a 25-item multidimensional inventory of cognitive-emotional-relational appraisals related with fear of failure. Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory projects aversive issues relating to how people reflect academic failure in relation to their environment and significant other: 1) fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, 2) fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, 3) fear of having an uncertain future, 4) fear of important others losing interest, and 5) fear of upsetting important others. Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory has a 5-point Likert scale response pattern ranging from "do not believe at all" (-2) to "believe 100% of the time" (+2). Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory has Cronbach's Alfa reliability coefficient of 0.80

### 4.4. Procedure for Administration

The instruments were given to the 75 fresh undergraduates who had sought counselling intervention service concerning their suicidal ideation challenges and are willing to participate in the research study on individual basis. Permission was obtained from the Head of Departments of the participants used for the study. The consent of the participants was sought and obtained after which they were instructed that their responses was for research purpose and the researchers will treat it confidentially. Instruments were read aloud and the purpose of the research was made

clear to the participants. The administration of the instrument lasted for three weeks. Thereafter, questionnaires were collected for scoring and analysis.

#### 4.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Percentage, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

### 5. Results

The results of the findings are thus, presented in the tables below:

**Research Question One:** What relationship exist between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety, depression and academic failure?

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix of Relationship between the variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std Dev	1	2	3	4
Expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers	96	34.16	7.11	1.000			
Learning Anxiety	96	7.02	2.13	0. -043	1.000		
Depression	96	9.43	3.08	0. -051	0. -063	1.000	
Academic Failure	96	9.71	3.18	0. -055	0. -047	0. -065	1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

From the result in table 1 it is observed that significant negative predictive relationship exists between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety, depression and academic failure. As observed with the highlighted mean, standard deviation and zero order correlation among the variables. Negative correlation as observed in order of magnitude indicates that academic failure ( $R=0. -055$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) has the highest negative correlational relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria. This is followed in sequence by depression ( $R=0. -051$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and then learning anxiety ( $R=0. -043$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This implies that learning anxiety, depression and academic failure negatively induce the expression of suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria in significant proportion detrimental to their intellectual wellbeing and general quality of life.

**Research Question 2:** What is the predictive relative contribution of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria?

**Table 2** Predictive relative contribution of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient	Rank	T	P
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	3.141	0.192			2.117	0.000
Learning Anxiety	0.163	-0.057	-0.043	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0.712	0.002
Depression	0.191	-0.066	-0.051	2 <sup>nd</sup>	0.903	0.001
Academic Failure	7.657E-02	-0.131	-0.117	1 <sup>st</sup>	1.101	0.000

Result in Table 2 indicates that among the variables of discourse, academic failure made the highest relative contribution on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria ( $\beta= -0.117$ ) followed by depression ( $\beta= -0.051$ ) and learning anxiety ( $\beta= -0.043$ ). This indicates that when university freshers experience learning anxiety if not managed it can stimulate symptoms of depression and this can further promote academic failure and eventually ignite expression of suicidal ideation among university freshers. This is possible considering the negative

implication of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on the mental health and rational thinking and daily functioning capability of university freshers.

**Research Question 3:** What is the prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria base on (learning anxiety, depression and academic failure) factors.

**Table 3** The prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria base on (learning anxiety, depression and academic failure) factors.

Inducing Factors	Respondents	Total Scores Attain by Respondents	Suicidal Ideation		Prevalence Rate		
			Male N (49) (51.04%)	Female N (47) (48.96%)	% Male	% Female	Total
Learning Anxiety	96	2879	1450 (50.36%)	1429 (49.64%)	50.36	49.64	100
Depression	96	7080	3574 (50.48%)	3506 (49.52%)	50.48	49.52	100
Academic Failure	96	8668	4395 (50.70%)	4273 (49.30%)	50.70	49.30	100
Suicidal Ideation	96	18627	9419 (50.57%)	9208 (49.43%)	50.57	49.43	100

Result in table 3 shows that the prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria is 50.57% for male and 49.43% for female. This indicates that male university freshers express more suicidal thought based on the compounding negative effect associated with the pressured challenges of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on their mental wellbeing and daily functioning. For example, as observed with the inducing factors of suicidal ideation in table 3 above, the prevalence rate of learning anxiety for male freshers is 50.36% while female is 49.64%. For depression the prevalence rate is 50.48% for male freshers and 49.52% for female. Also, for academic failure, the prevalence rate is 50.70% for male freshers an 49.30% for female freshers. The reason for this development can be aligned to the fact that Owerri, Imo state where this study was conducted is in the Eastern region of Nigeria and people in that area are driven more with the cultural orientation of self-sustainability via business and trading engagement. The students are not left out of this consciousness because majority of them are self-sponsored via their trade entrepreneurship activities and this makes them to be less focused with their academic task engagement to the detriment of their intellectual and career development. Repeated failure often makes them feel sense of hopelessness and disillusionment.

### 5.1. Hypothesis 1: Learning anxiety will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

**Table 4** Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing negative predictive relationship of learning anxiety and expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Df	P
Expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers	96	34.16	7.11	0. -043	94	Sig
Learning Anxiety	96	7.02	2.13			

Table 4 shows that learning anxiety has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0. -043, p > .05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected.



## 5.2. Hypothesis 2. Depression will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

**Table 5** Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing negative predictive relationship of depression and expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Df	P
Expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers	96	34.16	7.11	0. -051	94	Sig
Depression	96	9.43	3.08			

Result in table 5 revealed that depression has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0. -051$ ,  $p > .05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected.

## 5.3. Hypothesis3. Academic failure will not have significant predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria

**Table 6** PPMC: Showing negative moderating impact of domestic violence on secondary school students' academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	Df	P
Expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers	96	34.16	7.11	0. -055	94	Sig
Academic Failure	96	9.71	3.18			

Result in table 6 revealed that academic failure has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0. -055$ ,  $p > .05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected.

## 6. Discussion of findings of the Study

Answer to the first research question revealed that significant negative predictive relationship exists between expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria and their learning anxiety, depression and academic failure. Negative correlation as observed in order of magnitude indicates that academic failure ( $R = 0. -055$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) has the highest negative correlational relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria. This is followed in sequence by depression ( $R = 0. -051$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and then learning anxiety ( $R = 0. -043$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This has detrimental effect on their intellectual wellbeing and general quality of life. This corroborates the stated assertions of Olaseni et al (2022) that when some freshers fail to adjust to new university learning environment due to excessive academic workload, loneliness, irregular feeding, poor sleep, family expectation induced stress, peer pressure, and bullying; they may express sense of worthlessness, dejection, uncertainty about their future, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Furthermore, Olaseni et al (2022) posit that among Nigerian youths' suicidal ideation and suicide occurrence has become a fundamental issue of concern and a vital mental health challenge affecting their intellectual growth and general developmental lifespan.

The answer to the second research question indicates that among the variables of discourse, academic failure made the highest relative contribution on expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria ( $\beta = -0.117$ ) followed by depression ( $\beta = -0.051$ ) and learning anxiety ( $\beta = -0.043$ ). This indicates that when university freshers experience learning anxiety if not managed it can stimulate symptoms of depression and this can further promote academic failure and eventually ignite expression of suicidal ideation among university freshers. This development gives credence to the findings of Nwosu and Eze (2021). They stated that in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria students contend with academic demands, financial pressure, fear of failure, poor time management, social adjustment difficulties, and minimal access to psychological support services. These factors are major stressors that can ignite the feeling of suicidal ideation and possible suicide attempt.

The outcome of the third research question shows that the prevalence rate of expressed suicidal ideation among male and female university freshers in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria is 50.57% for male and 49.43% for female. This indicates that male university freshers express more suicidal thought based on the compounding negative effect associated with

the pressured challenges of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure on their mental wellbeing and daily functioning. For example, as observed with the inducing actors of suicidal ideation in table 3 above, the prevalence rate of learning anxiety for male freshers is 50.36% while female is 49.64%. For depression the prevalence rate is 50.48% for male freshers and 49.52% for female. Also, for academic failure, the prevalence rate is 50.70% for male freshers and 49.30% for female freshers. The reason for this development can be aligned to the fact that the Owerri, Imo state where this study is conducted is in the Eastern region of Nigeria and people in that area are driven more with the cultural orientation of self-sustainability via business and trading engagement. The students are not left out of this consciousness because majority of them are self-sponsored via their trade entrepreneurship activities and this makes them to be less focused with their academic task engagement to the detriment of their intellectual and career development. Repeated failure often makes them feel sense of hopelessness and disillusionment. This further shows that challenges of suicidal ideation is a serious mental health and intellectual development issue that has impaired the sanity of Nigerian university system, for example, Olawale and Umeh (2020) associated the occurrence of suicidal ideation and suicide with persistent academic failure, socio-personal and emotional trauma, family stressor, and mental health challenges. Suicidal ideation often occurs due to expressed feelings of hopelessness, dejection, or academic disenchantments or social isolation. Early detection and intervention are crucial for prevention.

The result of the first hypotheses affirmed that learning anxiety has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected. This indicates that navigating the multicomplex demands associated with independently studying to attain university education in Nigeria by freshers is often a major challenging developmental milestone as they embark on the path of responsibility and self-discovery. This is consistent with the affirmation of Bolton et al (2018). They stated that learning anxiety disorder, substance abuse, personality disorder, affective disorder and psychotic disorders are documented risk factors linked with suicide ideation. They further acknowledged that notably, learning anxiety disorder have a 10 times increased risk to ignite suicide attempt (Bolton, et al, 2018).

The result of the second hypotheses revealed that depression has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected. This supports the findings of previous researchers. For example, Kessler et al (2005) Studies established a strong association between depression and suicidal ideation. A study by Afolabi et al (2018) found that high depressive students were four times more likely to report suicidal ideation than those without. They further affirmed that depression typically projects depressive mood or disorder and connotes persistent feeling of loss of interest in normal life activities, expressed sadness over things that normally excites people, and negative feelings towards interpersonal relationship and blunt dissatisfaction with life generally.

The result of the third hypotheses indicates that academic failure has significant negative predictive relationship with expressed suicidal ideation among university freshers,  $r(94) = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . With this result the  $H_0$  is thus rejected. This result is in line with outcome of earlier studies. For example, according to Adewuya et al (2016); Oyetunji et al., (2021) and Sonia (2020) propensities of suicidal act is becoming prevalent among students in Nigerian universities. This includes desire to commit suicide and expression of suicidal behaviours as well as other anti-social risk behaviours such as poisoning, hanging and drug abuse due to inability to cope with academic rigors and experience of consistent academic failures in examinations. Simon et al (2007) stated that university students often express suicidal ideation due to their experience with academic maladjustment and dissatisfaction with poor academic performance that serves as key life stressor. For example, as at May 2019 Punch Newspaper reported that a 300-level medical student of Niger Delta University (NDU), Ammasoma in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria committed suicide due to repeated failure in his examination. PUNCH Metro gathered that the student, identified as Uzakah Ebiweni, dived into the Amassoma River and drowned before he could get help. Uzakah Ebiweni, a student of Surgery and Medicine at the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences of the NDU, decided to kill himself following his failure to realise his dream. Sources at the university said few hours after Ebiweni's body was recovered, another student attempted to kill himself by running into a fast-moving motorcycle was rescued by other students. This highlights the life-threatening challenges associated with academic failure among Nigerian students.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that suicidal ideation is significantly associated with symptoms of learning anxiety, depression and academic failure. This has grave implications on the mental health, intellectual growth and general developmental lifespan of students. Therefore, societal attention towards this detrimental phenomenon is necessary in order to make counselling psychotherapeutic intervention service available to remedy the situation.

### *Recommendations*

- Students should be given adequate orientation of the benefit of utilizing counselling services as a means for them to overcome their learning anxiety, depressive experience and academic failure in the course of their scholarship.
- University learning environment should be made convenient and accommodative of learners with diverse learning challenges as a measure to help them develop the capacity to be focus and goal driven.
- University authorities should endeavour to put in place functional counselling service centers that would help students understand their life space and appreciate their self-developmental progression with a consciousness to excel.

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### **Compliance with ethical standards**

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

Researchers declares that there is no conflict of interest associated with the conduct of this study.

#### *Statement of ethical approval*

Ethical approval was granted for the conduct of this study on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 with code number (REC/EDUPSY/G&C/00247)

#### *Statement of informed consent*

The conduct of this study aligned to the detailed procedures set by Research Ethical Committee Board of the Department of Educational Psychology/Guidance & Counselling of Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri, Imo State Nigeria.

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