

INFLUENCE OF SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND FEAR OF FAILURE ON LIFE SUCCESS ANXIETY AMONG FINAL YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN EKITI STATE, SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between sense of responsibility, fear of failure, and gender on life success anxiety among final-year undergraduate students in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The survey research design was employed, and a stratified sample of 300 students were selected from four tertiary institutions in Ekiti State which were Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State University, Afe Babalola University, and Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology. The instruments employed were sense of responsibility (Responsibility Attitude Scale), fear of failure (Short Form of the Future Anxiety Scale). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, t-test and regression analyses. Findings showed that sense of responsibility significantly predicted life success anxiety ($\beta = .49$, $R^2 = .24$, $p < .05$), while fear of failure also significantly influenced life success anxiety ($\beta = .46$, $R^2 = .21$, $p < .05$). Also, gender differences were observed, with male students reporting higher life success anxiety than females ($t = 2.24$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, sense of responsibility and fear of failure jointly explained 28% of the variance in life success anxiety ($R^2 = .28$, $F = 57.24$, $p < .05$), with each variable showing independent significant effects. The sense of responsibility and fear of failure are important psychological factors associated with life success anxiety among the students, while other factors also contribute. Based on the findings obtained, it was recommended that universities and policymakers should incorporate mental health-informed career guidance, resilience, and psycho-educational interventions into student support services, especially on final-year groups of students.

Keywords: Anxiety, Failure, Life Success, Responsibility, Students

INTRODUCTION

The desire for success is considered an inherent human motivation, so also is the related anxiety. Life success anxiety has increasingly surfaced as a separate component of concern for students' mental health within current tertiary education settings. Put simply, life success anxiety refers to a state of chronic apprehensiveness, fear, and subjective emotional tension experienced concerning anticipated personal capacity for the achievement of collectively and individually aspired accomplishments with a high degree of social significance and personal importance, namely a stable job, economic security, status recognition, and a sense of adult fulfillment (Brown, 2018; Muceldili et al., 2023).

Due to increasing population which consistently influence competitiveness within the job market, disparities regarding people's socioeconomic status, increasing uncertainty about future lifetime experiences, especially among young people when transitioning from tertiary institution experience toward a working life experience, life success anxiety has become worth examining (World Health Organisation, 2022; Ladejo, 2021). It has been linked to emotional suffering, compromised academic performance, and self-reported perceived subjective well-being (Etherton et al., 2020; Brumariu et al., 2022).

In recent years, anxiety has remained on a steady increase amongst university students across the world. Large-scale studies have identified that between a quarter to a third of university youth exhibit discernible symptoms of anxiety, mostly triggered by academic pressures and future anxiety (Auerbach et al., 2018; American College Health Association, 2023). No doubt, these anxieties range from academic-related issues of examinations and academic achievement to overall worries regarding employability, economic security, and satisfaction of familial and

societal demands (Imran et al., 2023). Such concerns reflect the societal standard that predicts success in life as being a measure of academic success and professional accomplishments which makes young individuals more vulnerable to mental issues.

In Nigeria as with most developing nations, the related pressures of success in life regarding anxiety over future inadequacy appear to be of heightened significance. Access to higher education is generally regarded as a main source for greater socioeconomic mobility, but instability in the economy, unemployment among university graduates, as well as a very competitive struggle for access to available job openings, increase final-year students' anxiety related to future inadequacy (Nwagwu et al., 2019; Adeyemo et al., 2020). This highlights the significance of understanding success anxiety among Nigerian undergraduates as both an education and public health priority.

One of the key psychological constructs that is easily becoming identifiable with life success related to anxiety is sense of responsibility. Sense of responsibility encompasses self-discipline, accountability, fulfilment of obligations, and commitment to personal and social roles (Nasirova, 2025). A well-developed sense of responsibility has been associated with positive academic engagement, self-regulation, resilience, and constructive goal-orientation (Etherton et al., 2020). Students who view themselves as responsible are more likely to be deliberate while planning and managing academic demands or coping with stress; this may protect them from anxiety and promote adaptive functioning (Duraku et al., 2018).

A strong or exaggerated sense of responsibility could, on the other hand, increase psychological strain in view of the expectations becoming unrealistic or internally imposed on the person as a sense of moral urgency. There exists empirical support

to prove that a strong desire to showcase responsibility and success can make the individual pressurize himself/herself, feel more intimidated by the threat of negative assessments, and become more susceptible to psychological distress in the wake of encountering setbacks (Martin et al., 2003; Yusupov et al., 2025). In a highly competitive learning context, a strong sense of responsibility can hence become a doubly edge construct that can work as a determinant of success simultaneously making the individual more prone to psychological distress in view of uncertainties regarding success.

Another psychological factor worth considering is the fear of failure, as often times linked with anxiety amongst students. According to Gao et al. (2024), fear of failure is defined as the avoidance, task-related state of high apprehension of failure of meeting the expectation of others, existing alongside the belief of serious threats of self-esteem, social standing, and future possibilities. Higher scores of fears of failure have been related to test anxiety, procrastination in studies of higher education, emotional disturbances, and disengagement in view of studies related to higher studies (Zarrin et al., 2020; Duru et al., 2024). Research also shows that students who have higher scores on the level of fear of failure have a greater propensity toward maladaptive forms of coping mechanisms such as self-handicapping and withdrawal, which affects their studies in negative ways (De Castella et al., 2013; Sudirman et al., 2023).

These challenges are further compounded in Nigeria by unstable economic conditions, high youth unemployment, under-employment of graduates and social expectations that equate success with rapid economic advancement (Nwagwu et al., 2019; Adeyemo et al., 2020). In Nigeria, students often carry the burden of family expectations, dependence, and prospects as future breadwinners. Therefore,

feelings of responsibility and fear of failure can coexist in increasing anxiety about success in life, especially in final-year undergraduates. There also exist gender differences, in which females experience greater anxiety because of extra expectations (Else-Quest et al., 2010; Borgonovi et al., 2020). Students also often carry the burden of family expectations, dependence and prospects as future breadwinners. Therefore, feelings of responsibility and fear of failure can coexist in increasing anxiety about success in life, especially in final-year undergraduates.

Among undergraduates in Nigeria, sense of responsibility, life success anxiety, and fear of failure represents important challenges that may affect students' psychological wellbeing and academic achievement. For instance, a strong sense of responsibility might become a problem when students feel too much pressure to meet academic, family and societal expectations, which can lead to self-imposed stress and feelings of not meeting up. In addition, life success anxiety may arise from uncertainty about employment, financial independence, and the ability to achieve socially valued goals after graduation, considering the economic difficulties and unemployment rate in Nigeria (Nwagwu et al., 2019; Adeyemo et al., 2020). In the same vein, fear of failure may cause students to worry too much about poor academic outcomes and their implications for self-esteem, future opportunities, and family expectations which contributes to anxiety, procrastination and academic disengagement (Zarrin et al., 2020; Duru et al., 2024). This study is therefore motivated by the need to deepen empirical understanding of how sense of responsibility and fear of failure influence life success anxiety among final-year undergraduate students in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Assess the influence of sense of responsibility on life success anxiety among undergraduates
- ii. Investigate the influence of fear of failure on life success anxiety among undergraduates
- iii. identify the influence of gender on life success anxiety among undergraduates
- iv. examine the joint and independent influence of sense of responsibility and fear of failure on life success anxiety among undergraduates in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

1. Sense of responsibility will have a significant influence on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.
2. Fear of failure will have a significant influence on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.
3. Gender will have a significant influence on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.
4. Sense of responsibility and fear of failure will have a joint and independent influence on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have examined different aspects that relate to life success anxiety. For instance, there are studies that evaluated the connections between anxiety and academic performance (Imran et al., 2023), self-efficacy and resilience as mediators of students' anxiety (Etherton et al., 2020; Jia et al., 2023), and

relationships between fear of failure and psychological distress, and other relevant personal aspects such as motivations and procrastinations (Zhang et al., 2018; Duru et al., 2024). Other studies evaluated other external dimensions such as socioeconomic factors, perfection, and learning environments and students' psychological well-being (De Castella et al., 2013; Ragusa et al., 2023). There is also evidence of gender difference in the level of anxiety exhibited among students as female's students experience greater anxiety because of extra expectations (Else-Quest et al., 2010; Borgonovi et al., 2020). From the foregoing, it is evident that anxiety is a multidimensional issue.

More recently, new literature is emerging with a focus on not only academic anxiety but also anxiety relating to life success. Evidence has revealed that a lack of clarity with regard to job market and economic independence creates a great psychological strain for students approaching graduation (Müceldili et al., 2023; Kuntary Ibrahim et al., 2025). Nevertheless, despite growing literature globally, literature concerning anxiety with regards to life success among African institutions of higher learning, and specifically Nigeria, is underrepresented.

Furthermore, although fear of failure and sense of responsibility have each been independently associated with student anxiety, few studies have examined their combined influence on life success anxiety, especially among final-year students for whom these concerns are most salient (Giel et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2024). There is also limited studies on how these constructs operate within Nigeria's unique sociocultural and economic context, where education, identity, and livelihood are closely intertwined.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, achievement motivation theory, attribution theory and self-determination theory are used to explain the association between sense of responsibility, fear of failure and life success anxiety.

The Achievement Motivation Theory by McClelland (1961) provide a good explanation on life success anxiety among undergraduates by postulating that human behaviour is governed by the need for achievement in which individuals are motivated to set goals, take responsibility for their actions, and strive toward excellence. Typically, final year students in Nigeria have a strong sense of responsibility and reflects high achievement motivation and finds manifestation in deliberate planning, self-discipline, and active engagement in academic and career-related tasks (Olatunji & Awoyemi, 2021). At the same time, fear of failure-a core element of this theory-can either facilitate performance when moderate or lead to increased anxiety and avoidance when excessive. For example, students internalizing family expectations and societal pressures can channel life success anxiety into productive preparation, whereas students overwhelmed by fear of failure can increasingly experience heightened levels of stress coupled with maladaptive behaviours such as procrastination and disengagement (Duru & Balkis, 2017).

This therefore provides a framework to understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations operating in conjunction with responsibility and fear of failure, which shape students' emotional and behavioural responses toward anticipated success. The theory of attribution on the other hand (Weiner, 1974) provides another explanatory direction, emphasising how students' interpretation of success and

failure influences motivation, emotions, and coping strategies. Undergraduates with well-developed sense of responsibility apply internal and controllable attributions to believe that the outcomes are the product of effort, planning and personal ability (Putwain & Symes, 2018). In this respect, such attributions encourage proactive behaviour, resilience, and adaptive strategies that alleviates life success anxiety. On the other hand, students who experience dominance and fear of failure may provide external or uncontrollable attributions when viewing setbacks beyond their control, such as bad luck, systemic barriers, or unfair assessment, thereby amplifying anxiety and discouragement (Folmer & Roe, 2016). The stability dimension of attribution further informs anxiety levels: perceiving failures as stable and immutable can intensify worry, while in turn, perceiving them as temporary and modifiable encourages problem-solving and persistence.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) further contributes by emphasising the role of intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. A sense of strong responsibility enables students to fulfill their need for autonomy, taking control of their educational and career goals, thus motivating themselves and overcoming anxiety. If their competence needs are met by skill development and success, they will overcome anxiety related to success in life, but a fear of failure, rather, inhibits their competence by acting with the avoidance strategy, as they experience extreme self-doubt, leading to heightened levels of anxiety. This is an indication that they have related, that is, their supportive family, peers, or mentor connections, which again protects their anxiety from the strain caused by the expectations of society.

METHODS

The survey research design was adopted for this study.

For this study, the study area selected for this study is Ekiti State. Ekiti State provides a relevant context because it has a strong educational orientation and one of the highest concentrations of tertiary institutions relative to population size in Nigeria, with a long-standing cultural emphasis on academic success as a pathway to social mobility (Ajayi, 2019; Adebayo & Ojo, 2021).

The population of study was four tertiary institutions in Ekiti State which include: Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), Ekiti State University (EKSU), Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD), and Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti (BOUESTI). The inclusion of multiple universities was intended to ensure adequate representation across public and private institutions, widen the sampling frame, and increase the generalisability of findings within the Ekiti educational environment. A total of 300 final year undergraduates were selected from the four tertiary institutions in Ekiti State using the stratified sampling technique using gender being the stratum.

At the first stage, the four institutions were selected to represent public and private tertiary institutions. At the second stage, the allocated sample for each institution was further stratified by gender. At the third stage, respondents were selected from the male and female strata using simple random sampling. In essence 75 students were selected from each institution.

A well-structured research instrument was designed for the purpose of the study. The research instrument was divided into four sections. Section A contained items on the respondents' demographic information such as gender, age, ethnicity, family

social class, and religious affiliation. Section B measured sense of responsibility using the 26-item Responsibility Attitude Scale (RAS) developed by Salkovskis et al. (2000), rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. Section C assessed fear of failure using the 25-item Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI) developed by Conroy (2001), rated on a 5-point Likert Scale, with reliability coefficients ranging from 0.80 to 0.90. Section D measured life success anxiety using the 5-item short version of Zaleski's Future Anxiety Scale on a 7-point Likert scale, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.833. Ethical procedures, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, were observed.

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered and retrieved. The data was coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v. 25), employing descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS**Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	128	42.7
	Female	172	57.3
Age	18-21 years	82	27.3
	22-25 years	151	50.3
	26-29 years	49	16.3
	30 years and above	18	6.0
Ethnicity	Yoruba	255	85.0
	Igbo	20	6.7
	Hausa	10	3.3
	Others	15	5.0
Family social class	Upper class	36	12.0
	Middle class	198	66.0
	Lower class	66	22.0
Religious affiliation	Christianity	244	81.3
	Islam	51	17.0
	Traditional religion	5	1.7

In Table 1, it was revealed that 42.7% of the respondents were male, while 57.3% were female. It was also revealed that 22-25 years constituted the largest age group, accounting for 50.3%. Most respondents were Yoruba (85%), belonged to the middle social class (66%), and identified as Christians, 244(81.3%).

Table 2: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Level	f	%	Mean	SD
Sense of responsibility (RAS)	Low (Mean = 26 - 69)	39	13.0		
	Moderate (Mean=70-112)	154	51.3	92.84	15.76
	High (Mean = 113 - 156)	107	35.7		
Fear of failure (PFAI)	Low (Mean = 25-58)	57	19.0		
	Moderate (Mean = 59-91)	156	52.0	72.46	14.28
	High (Mean = 92-115)	87	29.0		
Life success anxiety	Low (Mean=0-10)	53	17.7		
	Moderate (Mean=11-20)	159	53.0	16.43	3.51
	High (Mean=21-30)	88	29.3		

Source: Author's Survey 2026

Results presented in Table 2 revealed that the respondents generally demonstrated moderate levels of sense of responsibility, fear of failure, and life success anxiety, with mean scores of 92.84 (SD = 15.76), 72.46 (SD = 14.28), and 16.43 (SD = 3.51), respectively. The largest proportion of respondents fell within the moderate category for each of the three variables.

Table 3: Simple linear regression showing the influence of sense of responsibility on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State

Predictor variable	B	SE	β	t	R	R ²	F	P
(Constant)	9.192	.780		11.789				.00
Sense of responsibility	.289	.030	.485	9.564	.485	.235	91.46	.00

Source: Author's Survey 2026

The simple linear regression in Table 3 shows that sense of responsibility significantly influences life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State ($\beta = .49$, $t = 9.56$, $p < .05$). The contribution of sense of responsibility in explaining the variance in life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State was 24% ($R^2 = .24$), and the model was significant, $F(1, 298) = 91.46$, $p < .05$).

Table 4: Simple linear regression showing the influence of fear of failure on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State

Predictor variable	B	SE	β	t	R	R ²	F	P
(Constant)	7.733	1.004		7.699				.00
Fear of failure	.105	.012	.455	8.826	.455	.207	77.89	.00

Source: Author's Survey 2026

The simple linear regression in Table 4 shows that fear of failure significantly influences life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State ($\beta = .46$, $t = 8.83$, $p < .05$). The contribution of fear of failure in explaining the

variance in life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State was 21% ($R^2 = .21$), and the model was significant, $F(1, 298) = 77.89$, $p < .05$).

Table 5: Independent Sample t-test of gender on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State

DV		N	Mean	Std	Df	t	P
	Gender						
Life success anxiety	Male	128	16.98	3.49	298	2.24	<.05
	Female	172	16.06	3.48			

Source: Author's Survey 2026

Table 5 revealed that there was a significant gender difference on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State $t(298) = 2.24$ $p < .05$). Male participants reported higher life success anxiety (Mean = 16.98; SD = 3.49) compared to their female counterparts (Mean = 16.06; SD = 3.48) who reported lower life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Table Showing Joint and Independent influence of sense of responsibility and fear of failure on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State

Predictors	β	T	p	R	R^2	F	P
Sense of responsibility	.33	5.41	<.05				
				0.53	0.28	57.24	<.05
Fear of failure	.26	4.23	<.05				

Source: Author's Survey 2026

Table 6 shows that there was significant joint influence of sense of responsibility and fear of failure on life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State, $F(2,297) = 57.24$, $R^2 = 0.28$; $p < .05$. The $R^2 = 0.28$ indicates that the independent variable of sense of responsibility and fear of failure explained 28% variation in dependent variable (Life success anxiety). Further results show that sense of responsibility ($\beta = .33$; $t = 5.41$; $p < .05$) and fear of failure ($\beta = .26$; $t = 4.23$; $p < .05$) independently and significantly influence life success anxiety among final year undergraduate students in Ekiti State.

DISCUSSION

It was revealed that the students have a moderate level of sense of responsibility, fear of failure, and life success anxiety. It implies that while students experienced concerns about their responsibilities, possible failure, and future success, they were not excessively high.

The study revealed that sense of responsibility is a significant predictor of life success anxiety in final-year undergraduates which explains 24% of the variance. These results confirm the postulates of achievement motivation theory that proposes that individuals with an achievement drive experience feelings of responsibility to excel (McClelland, 1961). Also, the results show the significance of attribution in interpreting the findings of increased life success anxiety in the study respondents. According to Attribution Theory, responsible individuals will focus on internal, controllable attributes when achieving success, perceiving success to be reliant on their efforts and abilities (Putwain & Symes, 2018). It is evident that the respondents feel higher levels of psychological pressure owing to the anticipation of success or failure after completion of academics, which assumes particular significance in Nigeria, where identity, social expectations, and

financial success revolve largely within the context of education (Olatunji & Awoyemi, 2021).

It was also revealed in the study that fear of failure is a significant predictor of anxiety concerning life success, and it explained 21% of the variance. These findings are supported by theoretical and empirical literature that defines fear of failure as a key part of achievement anxiety. Indeed, when failure is either shamed away or relates to a potential loss of self-esteem, it is characterized as a major part of achievement anxiety rather than a separate construct like social anxiety (Duru & Balkis, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). Systematic research on self-determination theories refers to a lack of perceived competence and a basic psychological need as a determinant concerning intrinsic and not simply avoidance-motivated theories. In other words, a failure factor is part and parcel with a self-determined construct outside intrinsic theories. In a Nigerian sociocultural setting, students experience a perceived threat due to family and economic pressures and experience high achievement pressures (Kuntary Ibrahim et al., 2025). In other words, failure remains costly to students with amplified future anxiety regarding personal failures.

Lastly, the joint model revealed that constructs of sense of responsibility and fear of failure jointly explained 28% of the variance in life success anxiety, with the two constructs independently outlining significant effects. These findings are in line with the idea that life-success anxiety is the result of the interplay of adaptive striving and avoidance-driven fear of failure, as outlined in the Achievement Motivation Theory and the Attribution Theory (McClelland, 1961; Weiner, 1974). Responsibility-driven motivational styles foster engagement and performance-orientation, whereas the component of fear of failure incorporates

the idea of danger of failure, accompanied by self-doubt and increased emotional arousal under the odds of uncertain outcomes. Further explanation in the Self-Determination Theory outlines that the degree of balance in competence satisfaction and failure-related insecurity defines the difference between a proactive and an anxiety-driven motivational style (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These results provide a contribution to the existing literature, showing that life-success anxiety, unlike academic anxiety, is a complex process revolving around the motivational and attributional factors in the Nigeria higher-education system (Giel et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings obtained, it is evident that final year undergraduates have a moderate level of life success anxiety, sense of responsibility and fear of failure. Life success anxiety is associated with the way students perceive personal responsibility and anticipated failure as they approach the transition from university to life after graduation. This indicates that responsibility may become a source of psychological pressure when students perceive their future success as strongly dependent on their personal efforts and abilities. Similarly, fear of failure may heighten concerns about future outcomes by creating apprehension about not meeting personal, academic, family, and societal expectations. The combined contribution of sense of responsibility and fear of failure further suggests that life success anxiety is influenced by multiple psychological processes rather than a single factor. However, since these variables accounted for only 28% of the variance in life success anxiety, other personal, social, economic, and environmental factors may also contribute to students' concerns about future success. The

observed gender difference also suggests that students may experience and respond to expectations about future achievement differently

Based on these results, it is recommended that universities and policymakers incorporate mental health-informed career guidance, resilience, and psycho-educational interventions into student support services, especially on final-year groups of students. These interventions should aim to improve adaptive responsibility, realistic self-goal setting, and internal competence self-beliefs, concurrently working on maladaptive fear of failure cognitions using cognitive-behavioural and mentorship strategies. These interventions should also be gender-responsive and consider the reality of the Nigerian labour market.

Further studies should examine other factors that may contribute to life success anxiety among Nigerian undergraduates. Future research could investigate the roles of perceived social support, family expectations, self-efficacy, career uncertainty, financial concerns, employability perceptions, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background. In addition, comparative studies involving students from different geographical regions and types of tertiary institutions in Nigeria could provide broader evidence on the factors associated with life success anxiety.

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