

Assessment of Examination Anxiety Disorder among undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba: Implications for Counselling Psychologist

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Abstract

This paper examined the prevalent of examination anxiety among Undergraduate students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba: Counselling Implications. Three research questions were raised for this study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The Population of the study comprised four hundred and one (401) students in Federal College of Education (Technical), while one hundred and ninety-six (196) students were selected using random sampling technique to represent the entire population. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, titled: Examination Anxiety Disorder Among Undergraduate Students Questionnaire (EADSQ). The validated questionnaire was subjected to reliability test. Fifteen copies of the validated questionnaire were administered on students in Federal College of Education Umunze, Anambra State, using split-half method. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Correlation to ascertain the level of consistency which yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.79 indicating that the instrument is reliable. One hundred and ninety-six (196) Questionnaire were administered in Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba on the respondents by the researcher and were retrieved and analyzed. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and mean statistics. Findings revealed that, there are different types of examination anxieties and it prevalent among Undergraduate Students in the College. It was recommended that School management should establish and promote regular counselling orientation, and information services for the new and existing students specifically aimed at helping students manage examination anxiety.

Keywords: Examination anxiety, Prevalent, Undergraduate

Introduction

Education serves as the foundation of human advancement, and students training to become teachers occupy a distinct role in society. Their college journey goes beyond personal accomplishments; it's about gaining the skills and knowledge essential for shaping future generations. Yet, this honorable pursuit often comes with significant pressure and stress, especially during examination periods.

Examinations are structured assessments that measure a learner's understanding of a topic or skill, typically requiring them to answer questions or solve problems within a set timeframe. These assessments allow educators to evaluate students' retention and mastery of content (Singh, 2016). In educational settings, exams aim to measure students' ability to recall, apply, and analyze the information learned, serving as an essential indicator of academic progress and success. Examinations also offer feedback on the effectiveness of teaching methods (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2018). Typically standardized, exams provide a uniform way to assess students across institutions, aiming to minimize bias and give all candidates a fair chance to demonstrate their knowledge. Such standardized exams contribute to accountability within the education system (Hill, 2020). Beyond formal education, exams are used in professional and certification contexts to confirm competency in specific fields, ensuring individuals meet industry standards. In this way, examinations help uphold the integrity and credibility of various professions (Troutman & Grace, 2017). Examination anxiety is an intense emotional response experienced by students in the lead-up to exams, often marked by worry, fear, and tension, which can hinder their performance. This anxiety can disrupt clear thinking, memory recall, and task execution. It is a common issue that, if unmanaged, can be overwhelming. Factors contributing to this anxiety include fear of failure, insufficient preparation, and high expectations from parents or teachers. Adewale (2018) describes examination anxiety as situational stress triggered by the prospect of evaluation, leading to psychological and physiological responses that impact concentration and memory. Symptoms may include racing thoughts, sweating, and an increased heart rate—responses rooted in the body's fight-or-flight mechanism that can impair academic performance. Strategies like relaxation techniques and time management can help students mitigate anxiety. Obi (2019) defines examination anxiety as an intense fear arising from exam anticipation, which can damage a student's confidence and lead to poor performance. This anxiety can create a negative cycle where fear of failure diminishes confidence, further increasing anxiety.

Furthermore, Nwachukwu (2020) views Examination Anxiety as a psychological condition marked by apprehension and worry, which arises before or during exams and often results in decreased academic achievement. The negative impact of examination anxiety on academic achievement highlights the importance of addressing this issue within the educational system. Students experiencing anxiety may avoid studying or engage in

cramming, both of which can hinder learning. Schools can implement workshops that focus on study skills, emotional regulation, and anxiety management to support affected students. Yusuf (2021) defines Examination Anxiety as a mental and emotional response that includes nervousness and self-doubt, occurring when students perceive exams as threats to their self-worth or future prospects. Examination anxiety can be intensified by a student's perception of exams as high-stakes assessments that determine future success. When students internalize the idea that exams measure their worth, the pressure can escalate, leading to intense anxiety. Educators can help alleviate this by promoting a growth mindset and emphasizing learning over grades. Ibrahim (2022) describes Examination Anxiety as a debilitating worry specific to test situations, affecting cognitive processes such as memory recall and analytical thinking, which are essential for exam success. When anxiety disrupts cognitive functions, students may struggle to retrieve information or process questions effectively during exams. This can result in mistakes and lower scores, even if the student knows the material well. Techniques like deep breathing, visualization, and systematic desensitization can help in reducing cognitive disruptions caused by anxiety. Addressing these disruptions can enable students to perform to their potential in exam settings. Adesina (2023) defines Examination Anxiety as a form of academic stress that affects students' ability to perform in tests, often resulting from unrealistic expectations, lack of preparation, and personal insecurities. Unrealistic expectations, whether self-imposed or from external pressures, can drive students to feel overwhelmed and incapable, leading to examination anxiety. Examination anxiety among students are of different types. According to Okoye and Oladapo (2021), examination anxiety could be in a form of buildup of fear and worry in the days or weeks before an exam often detracts from productive study time (Anticipatory Anxiety); a sudden onset of fear right before or during the exam, frequently accompanied by physical symptoms like sweating and a rapid heartbeat, interferes with concentration (Situational Anxiety); anxiety specifically arising during the problem-solving or question-answering phase of exams can lead to mental blocks that impede information retrieval (Test Performance Anxiety); concerns about judgment or unfavorable comparisons by peers or instructors based on exam results can undermine self-confidence (Social Anxiety), among others. Each type of anxiety presents specific challenges, affecting students' examination experiences and academic outcomes.

Causes of examination anxiety among students in colleges of education are multi-dimensional. The fear of failure is one of the most common triggers of examination anxiety, especially in competitive academic environments where success in exams is directly tied to future opportunities such as employment or graduate studies. This fear often stems from the belief that academic performance is a measure of self-worth, and failure could lead to feelings of inadequacy or rejection by peers, family, or society. Zeidner (2018) highlights that this fear is not only personal but is often reinforced by external factors such as parental expectations and societal pressures, which can amplify the student's anxiety. A lack of effective study habits and time management skills can contribute significantly to anxiety. When students procrastinate or fail to organize their time well, they are often left cramming large amounts of information in a short period. This ineffective preparation can lead to a sense of helplessness, as students feel they are unprepared or overwhelmed. Owens (2019) found that students with better time management and study techniques tend to experience lower levels of anxiety, as they are able to approach exams with greater confidence and reduced stress. Perfectionism is another key factor driving examination anxiety. Students with high perfectionist tendencies often equate their worth with flawless academic performance. They are not only concerned with passing an exam but also with excelling, often setting unrealistic expectations for themselves. Eum & Rice (2017) explain that this relentless pursuit of perfection increases the likelihood of students feeling anxiety before exams, as the thought of not reaching their high standards creates stress and fear of disappointing themselves or others. Students are often in direct competition with one another for limited resources such as scholarships, internships, or placement in postgraduate programs. As noted by Putwain (2020), the constant comparison with peers and the drive to outperform others can increase stress, leading to chronic anxiety, especially during exam periods. Social influences play a significant role in the development of examination anxiety. Students frequently compare themselves to their peers, and this comparison can lead to a fear of underperforming relative to others. According to Von der Embse (2018), students may feel that their social standing, friendships, or respect from peers are at risk if they do not achieve certain academic outcomes.

Examination anxiety can severely hinder a student's academic performance by impairing cognitive processes essential for success, such as memory recall, attention, and problem-solving. When students are anxious, their working memory becomes less efficient, making it harder to retrieve information or

focus on the task at hand. Sarason & Pierce (2020) argue that even well-prepared students may underperform in high-pressure exam situations if they are unable to effectively manage their anxiety. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "choking under pressure" effect, where anxiety causes students to perform below their actual ability. The mental health consequences of sustained examination anxiety can be severe. Students who constantly experience anxiety during exams are more likely to develop chronic stress conditions, which can lead to other mental health issues such as depression or generalized anxiety disorder. Furlong (2021) emphasize that students in higher education who experience regular anxiety episodes during exams are at higher risk of developing long-term psychological problems, especially if they do not have access to appropriate mental health resources or coping strategies. These physical symptoms not only make it harder to focus during exams but can also affect students' overall health, leading to chronic fatigue or weakened immune systems. According to Owens (2019), students who experience persistent anxiety are more likely to suffer from burnout, which can have long-term consequences on both their physical and mental well-being. Examination anxiety often erodes students' confidence in their academic abilities. Students who perform poorly due to anxiety may begin to doubt their intelligence or capability, leading to a decline in self-esteem. Over time, this can lead to a negative academic self-concept, where students believe that they are incapable of succeeding in their studies. Eum & Rice (2017) explain that the link between anxiety and self-esteem is cyclical: the more anxious a student becomes, the more likely they are to perform poorly, and the lower their self-confidence becomes, further increasing their anxiety. In severe cases, students may begin to avoid situations that trigger their anxiety, such as skipping exams, avoiding studying, or procrastinating. This avoidance behavior can lead to a cycle of academic disengagement, where students withdraw from their studies in an attempt to avoid the stress associated with exams. Putwain (2020) suggest that in extreme cases, students may even drop out of school altogether if their anxiety becomes unmanageable, leading to negative long-term consequences for their academic and professional futures. As Furlong (2021) point out, social support is a crucial factor in managing anxiety, and students who isolate themselves are less likely to receive the emotional or psychological support they need from friends or family.

Hence the need to examine the prevalent of examination anxiety among Degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba: Counselling Implications.

Statement of the Problem

Examination anxiety has emerged as a critical concern among student's teachers and counsellors in colleges of education, undermining both their academic performance and psychological wellbeing. These aspiring educators face a unique double burden: they must not only master academic content but also develop the professional competencies needed to teach future generations. Even well-prepared students often find themselves paralyzed by anxiety during exams, their hearts racing and minds blanking – a particularly troubling phenomenon given their future role in helping students manage similar academic pressures. This is so evident among degree students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba. Why students demonstrate examination anxieties? What could be the causes of those anxieties? Are there consequences of those anxieties? Many questions begging for answers.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the prevalent of examination anxiety among Degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba: Counselling Implications.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the examination anxieties prevalent among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba.
2. Determine the causes of examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba
3. Examine the consequences of examination anxiety on degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the examination anxieties prevalent among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba?
2. What are the causes of examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba?

3. What are the consequences of examination anxiety on degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population of the study comprised four hundred and one (401) students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba while one hundred and ninety-six (196) students were selected using random sampling technique to represent the entire population. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, titled: Prevalent of Examination Anxiety Among Degree Students Questionnaire (PEADSQ). The questionnaire had two sections; section “A” comprised of the respondent’s personal data and section ‘B’ had structured questionnaire items with their corresponding response options. The questionnaire is a four-points rating scale which were coded and weighted as follows: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1); The instrument was validated by an expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba. The corrections and suggestions made by the experts reflected on the final copies of the instrument. The validated questionnaire was subjected to reliability test. Fifteen copies of the validated questionnaire were administered on lecturers in Federal College of Education Umunze, Anambra State, using split-half method. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Correlation to ascertain the level of consistency. The result yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.79 indicating that the instrument is reliable. One hundred and ninety-six (196) in Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba copies of the validated questionnaire were administered on the respondents personally by the researcher with the help of two research assistants and same were retrieved and analyzed. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and mean statistics. The decision rule is such that any mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded agree and mean scores less than 2.50 were deemed as disagree.

Results

Research Question One: What are the examination anxieties prevalent among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Responses on Types of Examination Anxieties among Degree Students in Colleges of Education

S/N	Statement	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Students express fear and worry days or weeks before the actual examination (Anticipatory Anxiety)	3.09	1.01	Agree
2	There high level of sudden fear that arises immediately before or during the examination among students (Situational Anxiety).	2.97	1.06	Agree
3	Students are known for the fear of answering questions or solving problems under exam conditions (Test Performance Anxiety).	3.17	0.90	Agree
4	Fear of judgment or comparison by peers or teachers based on exam performance is common among students (Social Anxiety).	2.89	1.09	Agree
5	There is high level of anxiety resulting from the need to achieve a perfect score or meet very high standards (Perfectionism Anxiety).	2.99	1.02	Agree
6	Stress caused by fear of not completing the exam within the given time limit is common among students (Time Pressure Anxiety)	3.02	1.04	Agree
7	Students are known for anxiety arising from fear of forgetting important information during the examination (Memory Loss Anxiety).	2.98	1.03	Agree
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.02	1.02	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2024

Table 1 revealed that respondents agree with items 1 to 7. This is because the mean score for items all the items in the table were significantly higher than 2.50 bench mark for determination of a value as agree or disagree. Grand mean of 3.02 revealed that there are different types of examination anxieties among Degree Students in Colleges of Education. The grand mean of 1.02 support the results.

Research Question Two: What are the causes of examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Responses on Causes of Examination Anxiety among Degree Students in Colleges of Education

S/N	Statement	Mean	STD	Remark
8	Lack of adequate preparation for exams due to poor time management leads to heightened anxiety.	2.96	1.05	Agree
9	Fear of failure, especially when tied to family expectations or societal pressure, increases anxiety levels.	3.08	1.01	Agree
10	High-stakes nature of examinations, where results significantly impact future opportunities, causes stress.	2.97	1.03	Agree
11	Past negative experiences or poor performances in exams create anxiety about current or future exams.	3.04	1.07	Agree
12	Inadequate understanding of the subject matter	3.15	0.94	Agree

	contributes to feelings of unpreparedness and anxiety.			
13	Unrealistic expectations from lecturers, peers, or self can create undue pressure and anxiety.	3.09	0.92	Agree
14	Limited access to academic resources (e.g., textbooks, study guides) makes students feel unprepared.	2.98	1.03	Agree
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.04	1.01	Agreed

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2024

Table 2 revealed that respondents agree with items 8 to 14. This is because the mean score for items all the items in the table were significantly higher than 2.50 bench mark for determination of a value as agree or disagree. Grand mean of 3.04 revealed that examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba is caused by several factors. The grand mean of 1.01 support the results.

Table 3: Examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T)

S/N	Statement	Mean	STD	Remark
15	Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and fatigue, which can further hinder performance.	2.99	1.09	Agree
16	Impaired academic performance, as anxiety interferes with concentration and recall during exams.	3.11	0.91	Agree
17	Increased likelihood of engaging in exam malpractice as a way to cope with overwhelming anxiety.	3.14	0.95	Agree
18	Reduced self-confidence, as repeated experiences of anxiety can lead to self-doubt and low self-esteem.	2.72	1.00	Agree
19	Avoidance behaviors, where students may skip classes or avoid exams to escape anxiety-provoking situations.	2.89	0.95	Agree
20	Development of long-term psychological issues, such as chronic stress or anxiety disorders.	2.84	1.06	Agree
21	Disruption in academic progress, potentially leading to delayed graduation or discontinuation of studies.	2.91	1.10	Agree
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		2.94	1.01	Agreed

Table 3 revealed that respondents agree with items 15 to 21. This is because the mean score for items all the items in the table were significantly higher than 2.50 bench mark for determination of a value as agree or disagree. Grand mean of 2.94 revealed that examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba comes with several consequences. The grand mean of 1.01 support the results.

Summary of Findings

Findings of the study can be summarized thus:

1. There are different types of examination anxieties among Degree Students in Colleges of Education.
2. Examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba is caused by several factors.
3. Examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba comes with several consequences.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data revealed that there are different types of examination anxieties among Degree Students in Colleges of Education. Students express fear and worry days or weeks before the actual examination (anticipatory anxiety); there high level of sudden fear that arises immediately before or during the examination among students (situational anxiety); students are known for the fear of answering questions or solving problems under exam conditions (test performance anxiety); fear of judgment or comparison by peers or teachers based on exam performance is common among students (social anxiety); there is high level of anxiety resulting from the need to achieve a perfect score or meet very high standards (perfectionism anxiety); stress caused by fear of not completing the exam within the given time limit is common among students (time pressure anxiety); students are known for anxiety arising from fear of forgetting important information during the examination (memory loss anxiety). This is in agreement with Okoye and Oladapo (2021) who reported that examination anxiety could be in a form of buildup of fear and worry in the days or weeks before an exam often detracts from productive study time (Anticipatory Anxiety); a sudden onset of fear right before or during the exam, frequently accompanied by physical symptoms like sweating and a rapid heartbeat, interferes with concentration (Situational Anxiety).

Analysis of data also revealed that examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba is caused by several factors. The factors are identified to be lack of adequate preparation for exams due to poor time management, fear of failure, especially when tied to family expectations or societal pressure, high-stakes nature of examinations, where results significantly impact future opportunities, past negative experiences or poor performances in exams, inadequate understanding of the subject matter, unrealistic expectations from lecturers, peers, or self and limited access to

academic resources (e.g., textbooks, study guides). This agrees with Zeidner (2018) who highlighted that this fear is not only personal but is often reinforced by external factors such as parental expectations and societal pressures, which can amplify the student's anxiety.

Analysis of data further revealed that examination anxiety among degree students in Federal College of Education (T) Asaba comes with several consequences. This is because physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and fatigue, which can further hinder performance;

impaired academic performance, as anxiety interferes with concentration and recall during exams; increased likelihood of engaging in exam malpractice as a way to cope with overwhelming anxiety; reduced self-confidence, as repeated experiences of anxiety can lead to self-doubt and low self-esteem; avoidance behaviors, where students may skip classes or avoid exams to escape anxiety-provoking situations; development of long-term psychological issues, such as chronic stress or anxiety disorders and disruption in academic progress, potentially leading to delayed graduation or discontinuation of studies. This is in line with Owens (2019) who reported that students who experience persistent anxiety are more likely to suffer from burnout, which can have long-term consequences on both their physical and mental well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, examination anxiety among students presents a significant challenge that affects students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall learning experience. The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted nature of this issue, with various contributing factors and wide-ranging consequences.

Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive, collaborative effort from school management, educators, and students.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

1. School management should establish and promote regular counselling services specifically aimed at helping students manage exam anxiety.

2. Regular workshops should be focused on causes of Examination Anxiety offered by the college. These could include sessions on stress management techniques, relaxation exercises, mindfulness, and breathing practices.
3. School counsellor should create awareness of consequences of Examination Anxiety welcoming atmosphere where students feel comfortable.

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