



PATTERNS OF EXAMINATION ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILORIN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA



Omosidi, A. S. Ph.D.

Department of Educational Management,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin,
Nigeria

&

Adigun, A. A.

Department of Counsellor Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin,
Nigeria.

adigunakeem183@gmail.com

Abstract

Anxiety is a negative emotion which affects human beings irrespective of social status. However, individuals exhibit anxiety in different forms. This study therefore investigated the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. The influence of variables of gender and school type on respondents' views was also examined. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study while random sampling technique was employed in selecting 180 students across six secondary schools in the three local government areas in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. A questionnaire entitled "Patterns of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (PEAQ)" was used to collect relevant data. The instrument was validated by experts in the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin and test re-test reliability co-efficient of 0.66 was obtained. The two hypotheses postulated were tested using t-test statistics at .05 alpha level. The findings of the study revealed that the major patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis are worry, faster heartbeat, fears, and restlessness before and during examinations. The study also revealed no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students based on gender and school type. In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that school authorities should provide a favourable examination environment for the students; teachers should teach students regularly to be mentally prepared for examinations and counsellors should equip the students with anxiety coping skills in order to assist them to overcome anxiety before and during examinations.

Keywords: Patterns, Examination anxiety, students, secondary school, Ilorin metropolis

Introduction

Determination of the extent or level to which an individual has achieved the aims and objectives of education requires that he/she is assessed or evaluated especially through

testing. According to Olowonirejuaro and Akande (2005), every educational programme must be evaluated to establish its effectiveness or otherwise. It implies that education would not be regarded to have taken place, if the recipients have not attained certain standards through the evaluation process (Abdullahi, 2005). One of the ways of ensuring this is through the conduct of examination. Thus, examination is an important tool used for evaluation within the school system.

Okoye (1986) viewed examination as an organized assessment technique which presents the individual with a series of questions or tasks geared towards ascertaining the person's acquired skills, knowledge, content and ability to utilize this knowledge and skill effectively. Olayinka (1993) opined that examination is an instrument used to measure what has been accomplished during the period of study which weighs each candidate's overall knowledge and appraises his/her ability. Obe (1996) explained that examination still remain one of the most powerful weapons of the school system and paramount in every candidate's mind.

Usually, examinations do pose some amount of stress and anxiety on the students. Anxiety is universal phenomenon, that is, it affects everyone irrespective of gender, age and status. It usually results from different personal life and environmental experiences. Barlow (2002) stated that anxiety can be caused by both internal and external stimuli. The internal stimuli according Morakinyo (2005) composes of feelings of thoughts and what goes on around, while the external stimuli composes of environmental situations which give some concern of fear that covers general events about life. In the opinion of Oresanya, Lyons and Finlayson (2014), anxiety may arise when there is frustration occurring in some major life problems related to vocational, educational or adjustment. Educational anxiety in this study revolved around examination anxiety.

Corey (1995) defined anxiety as a learned response to situations that threaten an individual's security and self-esteem. Rachman (2004) opined that anxiety is the tense, disturbing anticipation of a threatening but elusive event; a feeling of tense suspense. According to Barlow (2002), anxiety is a negative mood state characterized by bodily symptoms of physical tension and apprehension about the future. It is a psychological problem characterized by somatic emotional, cognitive and behavioural components. In the view of Ziedner and Mathew (2005), examination anxiety means the appraisal of a test or other evaluative situation as threatening and consists of distinct cognitive, affective, physiological and behavioural components. The cognitive component as explained by Connors, Putwain, Woods and Nicholson (2009) refers to worrisome thoughts and concerns about the consequences of failure; the affective-physiological component to physical sensations that accompany anxiety (trembling, headaches, etc.) and the behavioural component to actions indicating a lack of task focus during an examination such as playing with a pencil, looking around the room and so forth.

The finding of Trifoni and Shahini (2011) has revealed that many students usually experience high level of examination anxiety. Factors such as lack of fear of negative evaluation, lack of preparation for examination/ or inadequate preparation, bad experiences on previous tests, the difficulty of course content, the number of items included in the test and time limitation and pressure have been identified by researchers as some of the causes of examination anxiety among students. Ohata (2005) finding for

instance, noted that learners sometimes experience pressure when they see that they have to organize their ideas in a short period of time. In the same finding, most of the participants in the study admitted that they feared taking tests, because test-taking situations would make them fearful about the negative consequences of getting a bad grade. The study of Young (1991) found that students felt anxious when they had studied for hours for an examination and then found in the examination question types which they had no experience about. McDonald (2001) has submitted that examination anxiety may rise steadily throughout the early years of schooling, which may be attributable to factors such as the ever increasing pressure from parents and teachers, cumulative experiences of failure, the increasing complexity of learning materials as well as an age-related increase in the accuracy of reporting anxiety.

Studies have established the influence of moderating variables of gender and school type on examination anxiety among students. The study of Hembree (1988) for example, found that gender and school type contributed to the anxiety level of students. King, Ollendick and Gullone (2000) found a difference in anxiety responses between males and females; with females generally self-reporting higher levels of test anxiety symptoms than males. The results of Trifoni and Shahini (2011) also showed that subject variable of gender was correlated with some aspects of test anxiety where female learners feel more worried and anxious than their male counterpart. Olushola (2008) finding revealed that no significant difference in the causes of academic related anxiety among students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State on the basis of gender and mode of residence.

Examination anxiety as an emotional reaction of students in testing situation has been identified by psychologists as a determinant of academic performance. McKeachie, Lin and Holinger (1991); Culler and Holahan (1980); Ryan and Deci (2001) highlighted the inhibitive effect of test-anxiety on academic performance. Their views affirmed that high anxious students perform more poorly on cognitive demanding task than less test anxious subjects especially when performance condition is evaluative. During difficult task in which evaluative stress is present, low test anxious students tend to achieve better than high test anxious students. They noted that high test anxious students are dexterously affected by conditions such as achievement-orienting instruction. The research finding of Iroegbu (2013) revealed that the students with low anxiety performed better than those with high anxiety and female gender performed better than the male gender. The study of Trifoni and Shahini (2011) supports this assertion as they found that students are usually affected by test anxiety, before but especially during the administration of the test. According to the findings, test anxiety gives rise to physical and psychological problems as well. It affects motivation, concentration and achievement negatively, increases errors during the exam, creates problems recalling the material previously learned and prevents efficient study.

Studies (McDonald, 2001; Owen-Yeates, 2005) have reported that children and adolescents have described tests and examinations as worrisome, anxiety-provoking and stressful events. The test anxious students may have difficulty in concentrating during a test, and in reading and understanding test instructions and questions; they may become easily distracted, and experience problems in recalling learnt material (King, Ollendick & Gullone, 2000). Olatoye and Afuwape (2003) also highlighted different patterns in which students show examination anxiety in their description of examination anxiety as

the physiological state of mind of a candidate about a test as expressed by the level of worry, fear, uncertainty, concern and helplessness expressed before, during or even after a test or examination. Olatoye and Afuwape (2003) explained that when an individual becomes anxious, the physiological system becomes aroused, such as the heart beating faster or the sweat glands producing more perspiration. At the same time the person may experience a higher sense of inadequacy.

Ballow (2002) stated that examination anxiety could occur in forms of nervousness, inability to sleep, apprehension and worrying. According to Busari and Uwakwe (2001), victims of extreme examination anxiety are not able to think of solution or adaptation to their immediate problem. Some other patterns of examinational anxiety are shaking of hands and blank-out that is, inability to be able to read, recall, organize and solve problems with speed and cognitively of which he is otherwise capable (Nicole, 2010), rapid heartbeat or jumping heartbeat (Spencer, 2012), illness or feeling sick (Pervez, 2014), freezing or development of mental block, stomach ache or diarrhea (Womble, 2003).

To this end, it is crystal clear that examination anxiety is a common occurrence among students before or during examination and has a potential of ruining students' academic performance which in turn could be detrimental to students future job placement. This creates the need for the researchers to investigate the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis in order to proffer appropriate educational and counselling intervention to ameliorate or control the situation.

Statement of the Problem

Anxiety is a normal experience in every individual. However, its impact may be varying from one person to another. Many intelligent and brilliant students have become regular failure and consequently, drop out from school as a result of examination anxiety (Pervez, 2014). Anxiety usually set in before, during and even after examination which makes them susceptible to manifestations such as sleepless night, lack of self-confidence, confusion, lack of concentration, lack of focus among other hosts of examination anxiety effects.

Several studies have been done on examination anxiety among students. For instance, Ibrahim (1998) studied the changes in level of anxiety and academic performance of college students. The study revealed that students had higher anxiety level during non-stress period than during the stress period, although no significant difference was obtained among the three periods. Ajiboye, Ojo, Saidu and Okesina (2016) studied the sources of examination anxiety among final year students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The findings of their study revealed that emotion is the major source of examination anxiety among final year students of tertiary institutions. The finding also revealed differences in the male and female respondents' views on sources of examination anxiety.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the studies of Ashaolu (2008) and Ajiboye, et. al. (2014) were carried out in Ilorin, Kwara state but focused on causes of examination anxiety among students of tertiary institutions. This follows that none of these studies have examined the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in

the area of study. This is the gap left behind by previous studies which the researcher intends to fill by investigating the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated for the purpose of the study:

1. What are the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis?
2. What is the difference in the patterns of anxiety experienced by male and female secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis?
3. What is the difference in the patterns of anxiety experienced by private and public secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis?

Research Hypotheses

Two research hypotheses were formulated to guide the conduct of the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by male and female secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by private and public secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to establish the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. Descriptive survey is considered appropriate for this study because it involves a systematic collection of information from a sample of population through the use of questionnaire in order to describe and interpret the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.

The population for this study consists of all secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. The sample for this study consists of six secondary schools from the three local government areas (i.e. Ilorin South, East and West). For the purpose of this study, random sampling method was used to draw 180 respondents from six secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis, making 30 students from each school.

The instrument used to collect data for this study is a self-designed questionnaire titled "Patterns of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (PEAQ)". The instrument consists of two (2) sections. Section "A" elicits responses on bio-data information about the participants such as gender, class and school type. Section "B" elicits information on the "Patterns of Examination Anxiety among Secondary School Students" and it consists of twenty (20) items. Section B was rated using a Four-Point Likert Type scale. Respondents were to indicate degree of agreement and disagreement to the items. Thus: SA: Strongly Agree - 4 points; A: Agree - 3 points; D: Disagree - 2 points; and SA: - Strongly Disagree - 1 point. The modality for scoring the instrument ranges from 1-4 (1, 2, 3, 4); hence the

Table 3: Mean, SD and t-test result showing the difference in patterns of examination anxiety experienced by students based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	86	37.63	8.81	178	0.27	1.96	0.78
Female	94	37.99	8.79				

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.27 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, while the calculated p-value of 0.78 is greater than the corresponding p-value of 0.05 level of significant. This indicates lack of significance hence, the hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by male and female secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.

Ho2: *There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by private and public secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.*

Table 3: Mean, SD and t-test result showing the difference in patterns of examination anxiety experienced by students based on school type

School Type	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Private	61	36.90	7.44	178	1.00	1.96	0.38
Public	119	38.29	9.39				

Table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value of 1.00 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, while the calculated p-value of 0.38 is greater the corresponding p-value of 0.05 level of significance, hence the hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by private and public secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.

Discussion

The major findings of this study revealed that the major patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis are worry, faster heartbeat, fear, restlessness and sweat before and during examination. The implication of this is that secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis are emotionally and psychologically disturbed before and during examination. The findings of this study are similar with the findings of Spencer (2012) which highlighted rapid heartbeat, fear and restlessness as some of the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by students. The faster heartbeat, restlessness and sweat are physical reaction to examination condition, while worry and fear relates to the mental distress(s) about the aftermath of failure which may have a negative impact on students' academic performance outcomes. Arogundade (2012) described the cognitive aspect to examination anxiety as the mental activity that goes on during the examination period which involves potential negative self-image about oneself such as thinking about consequences of failure and lack of confidence in one's ability. Ballou (2005) also stated that elevated heart rate and increased body temperature are associated with the emotional component of examination anxiety, while worry consists of internal expectations of failure based upon past performance.

score ranging from 2.5 and above was considered as the major pattern of examination anxiety, while mean score below 2.5 was considered as the least pattern of examination anxiety exhibited by the students.

Descriptive statistics (percentage and mean rank) as well as t-test were used to analyze the data collected as t-test method sought to find the difference between the means of two variables. The two hypotheses were thus, tested at 0.05 significance level.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Gender	Male	86
		Female	94
		Total	180
2	Class	SSS 1	42
		SSS 2	138
		Total	180
			100.0
3	School Type	Public	61
		Private	119
		Total	180
			100.0

Table 1 shows that out of 180 respondents who participated in the study, 86 (47.8%) were male, while 94 (52.2%) were female. 42 (23.3%) of the respondents were in SSS 1, while 138 (76.7%) were in SSS 2. 61 (33.9%) of the respondents were from private school, while 119 (66.1%) were from public secondary school.

Research Question: What are the patterns of anxiety exhibit by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis?

Table 2: Mean and rank order of major patterns of examination anxiety among students

Item No	Item	Mean	Rank
1	I do worry about failure during examination	2.83	1 st
10	My heart beat faster during examination period	2.72	2 nd
6	Fear crept into my heart when I hear of examination	2.72	3 rd
18	I become restless when examination date is announced	2.65	4 th
9	I sweat profusely under examination condition	2.65	5 th

Table 2 indicates the rank order of the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. The table shows that out of all the 20 items in the questionnaire form, only five items, that is, items 1 (with mean score 2.83), 10 (with mean score 2.72), 6 (with mean score 2.72), 18 (with mean score 2.65) and 9 (with mean score 2.65) have the average mean scores that are above 2.5 and were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. This implies that the major patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis are worry, faster heartbeat, fear, restlessness and sweat before and during examination.

Ho 1: *There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by male and female secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis.*

The students may have experienced worry, faster heartbeat, fear, restlessness and sweat before and during examination because of their unpreparedness for examination, failure in the previous examination, examination hall that is filled up with large number of invigilators, threat of the consequences of examination malpractices should any student caught, when a cheater is found in one's vicinity or inability to recollect. Dee (2007) stated that patterns of examination anxiety could be triggered by different circumstances and situations. According to Dee (2007), a student may, for example, feel negative and talk from a negative perspective by viewing examination condition as being worse than the situation merits; this would tend to be an out-of-balance behaviour pattern for that person, whereas, another student who is experiencing examination anxiety may, instead, withdraw and avoid contact with people.

The first hypothesis revealed no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by male and female secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. This implies that gender has no influence in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students. The finding is in line with that of Karadeniz (2011) whose finding revealed no significant difference in the achievement level of students based on gender. However, some other findings such as Trifoni and Shahini (2011) have found differences in the examination anxiety experienced by students. This implies that there are mix findings regarding the influence of gender on examination anxiety among students. Personality differences of individual students might have been responsible for this finding.

Hypothesis two also revealed lack of significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis based on school type. This implies that school type has no significant influence in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. This finding contradicts the finding of Moore (2013) who found a significant difference in the examination anxiety level of students based on type of school (private and public). The evidence that students from private schools usually outshine their public counterparts in terms of academic performance might have contributed to the difference in the patterns of examination anxiety they experienced.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the main patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary schools students included worry about failure; fast heart beat during examination and fear. No significant difference existed in the patterns of examination anxiety experienced by the respondents based on gender and school type. The implication is that school managers and counsellors need to provide support services to students in order to assist them to overcome examination anxiety.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are consider relevant:

- a. The school management should have adequate planning in the preparation of

- examination. This would assist in eliminating threats and fears that are usually associated with examinations by students.
- b. The school management should improve on the method supervision by teachers to promote developmental supervision rather than policing. This would enable the students to be mentally and academically ready for examinations.
 - c. The school counsellors should equip students with skills on preparation for examination and coping with examination anxiety in order assist them to overcome examination challenges.
 - d. The school authority should provide an accommodating and favourable examination environment free from all sorts of threat and fear so that students will be able to compose themselves and overcome examination anxiety.
 - e. The teachers should regularly teach students to be mentally and academically prepared for examinations so as to handle examination condition effectively.

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