

Sources of Examination Anxiety among Final Year Students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Examination anxiety, a common phenomenon among students of tertiary institution (most especially the finally students), is characterized by feelings of severe apprehension, uneasiness, nervousness, fear and tension which often predispose them to academic failure in particular and health hazards on the other hand. This study therefore investigated sources of examination anxiety among final year students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The descriptive survey method of research was adopted for the study while the simple random sampling technique was used to select 600 respondent that participated in the study. The instrument used to gather the required information was questionnaire type titled "Sources of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (SEAO)". It has two sections (A&B). Section 'A' sought the demographic information of the respondents while 'B' has four sub-sections containing five items each. The measure of central tendency and t-test statistics were used to analyse the data gathered for the study. The findings revealed that emotion is the major source of examination anxiety among final year students of tertiary institutions. The respondents were different in their sources of examination anxiety based on gender but similar based on mode of entry. It was recommended that guidance counsellors, curriculum planners and seasoned educational administrators should be adequately involved in students' affairs and in formulating academic calendar for tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Examination is an integral part of the education system upon which decisions are taken on the students, the entire school programme and the instructors themselves. Corroborating this view, Abdullahi (2005) stated that for education to be seen to have taken place, the recipients are expected to have attained certain standard through the evaluation process. This is imperative in order to establish the effectiveness or otherwise of education through the conduct of examination. Thus, examination can be described as the end-of-term or end-of-course assessment procedure, which qualifies the examinee to obtain a specified degree. The process requires an organized assessment technique that presents the students with a series of questions or tasks tailored towards ascertaining the candidate's acquired skills, knowledge, content and ability to utilize these knowledge and skills effectively (Okoye, 1986). Since examinations are instruments used to measure student's sum of knowledge and ability, they become inevitable in the school system. Despite the indispensable place of examination in educational setting, students are often not comfortable with it because it often provokes anxiety and stress, especially among final year students of various institutions of learning. Although a certain degree of anxiety arousal or activation is a prerequisite to adequate everyday functioning but in many cases it could overwhelm students to the extent of becoming incapacitated in attempting examination questions adequately.

Anxiety can be viewed as one of the characteristics of human beings. It is a general term for several disorders that can cause nervousness, fear, apprehension and worrying (Cohen, 2010). The general apprehension and tension of the anxious individuals are due in part to over activity of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), which produces several symptoms with regards to a person's nature. Anxiety and fear may be confused to mean the same thing. However, Ashaolu (2001) distinguished the terms by stressing that fear refers to an apprehensive reaction to some external, definite or non-conflictual dangers, which is an internal vague of feeling towards a threat that individual has only partial awareness. On the other hand, anxiety can be seen as a more general feeling which is not clearly and specifically attached to any apparent cue. In a similar view, Cohen (2010) referred to anxiety as "free floating", which suggests that it is not attached to anything specific that a person can identify but expression of fear of the unknown.

According to Arogundade (2012), anxiety can be experienced anywhere among which the school place is no exception. It is apparent that some students write examination with average degree of nervousness, others find it difficult to adjust very well to the examination conditions while many experience severe uneasiness, apprehension or fear which could be detrimental to their performance under a given assessment process. Thus, examination anxiety is a fairly common phenomenon that involves feeling of tension or uneasiness that occurs before, during or after an examination (Nicole, 2010). It is typically referred to as state of anxiety characterized by more fleeting anxious reaction to a specific situation, which is often present in academic and evaluation settings and otherwise known as evaluative stress and performance anxiety (Cassady, 2010). When examination anxiety exceeds the optimum level of ability of students to cope, the result is a decline in academic performance in particular and general discomfort. Examination anxiety is usually characterized by fears of; inadequate preparation, forgetting important information necessary for passing examination, alienation from parents or friends, loss of control, inadequate time and other related factors (Olushola, 2008). Hancock (2001) stated that,

overwhelming fear of failures is the major predictor of examination anxiety among college students. This suggests that, the fear of the outcome of examination is grossly responsible for worry, apprehension, tension and uneasiness among students.

The experience of anxiety among students as they prepare to take examinations is a common phenomenon but with varying degrees depending on the stage of the study and most essentially the nature of the examination. In Nigeria Universities, examination are administered to admit students into various courses, promote students to higher stages, select students for special academic awards and most importantly final examinations determine the completion of the course of study. The peculiarity of the final year examination may contribute immensely to different degree of anxiety that could manifest among final year students. At the final year level, the examinations are usually subjected to through moderation (standardization) as well as the results; the outcome determines whether or not the student will graduate, the performance may significantly determine the class of degree the student obtains, and generally such examination can make or mar individual's life (if the results are excellent or otherwise respectively). When students fail examinations at lower levels of university education, they have opportunities to resist for such courses as *carry-over* at the next level: the hope is that such student could make it up and graduate with other course mates. But in the case of final year the consequence of failing an examination suggests staying back for either a semester or two (as applicable) to re-take the examination. Thus, a number of factors may account for examination anxiety among final year students which could differ from other levels in the university.

Statement of the Problem

The desire of students to attain academic success is often thwarted by many factors among which examination anxiety is paramount. Most time, the performance in examination is affected because students exhibit nervousness, apprehension, fear, uneasiness and other characteristic of anxiety. Olushola (2008) found that test anxiety accounted for gross failure among students of tertiary institutions and thus recommended equipping students with coping strategies. Similarly, Okesina (2012) established a correlation between examination anxiety and poor academic performance among senior secondary school students in Nigeria. The present study therefore investigated sources of examination anxiety among final year students of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Research Questions

What major source is responsible for examination anxiety among final year students of university?

Research Hypotheses

- (i) There is no significant difference in the sources of examination anxiety among final year students of university based on gender.
- (ii) There is no significant difference in the sources of examination anxiety among final year students of university based on mode of entry.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method of investigation was adopted for this study. Thus, the expression of a representative sample of the population was obtained through the use of questionnaire titled "Sources of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (SEAQ)". The instrument (SEAQ) has four sub-sections (Personal, School, Home, Emotion) with five items under each. The items under the sub-sections are designed to measure sources of examination anxiety among final year students. The instrument used was subjected to the test-retest method of reliability and a coefficient of 0.81 was established and thus found reliable for the purpose of the study. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 6 out of the 15 faculties in the University of Ilorin (as at the time of the investigation). Similarly, simple random sampling technique was used to select 600 respondents (final year students) who were purposively stratified across the variables of gender and mode of entry. The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents in the halls before the commencement of examination. The frequency counts, measure of central tendency and t-test statistics were used to analyse the data collected.

Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender and Faculty

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	280	46.7
Female	320	53.3
Total	600	100.0
Mode of Entry		
Direct	248	41.3
UTME	352	58.7
Total	600	100.0

The results in table 1 revealed that 46.7% of the respondents are males while 53.3% are females: more female participated in the study. A total of 352(58.7%) of the sample size for the study were admitted into the university through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) while 248(41.3%) came in through Direct Entry (DE).

Research Question 1:

What major source is responsible for examination anxiety among Final year students of University?

Table 2: Rank Order of Sources of Examination Anxiety

Source of Exam Anxiety	Mean Score	Rank
Emotion	10.11	1 st
Personal	10.02	2 nd
School	9.86	3 rd
Home	9.81	4 th

The results shown in table 2 provide answer to the research question. Emotion is the major source of examination anxiety among final year students of the University of Ilorin. This suggests that examination anxiety manifests among final year students because of panic over failure, lack of self-confidence, worry about performance, negative mindset on examination and feeling of confusion on how to answer questions. This result corroborates the earlier finding of Cherry (2013), which established that most students exhibit anxiety as a result of fear of possible poor performance and worry over the consequences. The final year students of the University of Ilorin are not exempted in this direction since they expressed been apprehensive over possibly unsatisfactory outcome of examination grades. A good reason why emotion plays major role in provoking examination anxiety is the fact that individual is entitled to his/her feelings and may not want to share such with others even if it is negative. Thus, students could suffer emotional threats for a long time which in turn may degenerate to examination anxiety and consequently poor performance.

Another source which is of significance is 'personal' factors. As reflected in the instrument, this implies that final year students develop examination anxiety as a result of inadequate preparation, poor time management, memory of previous poor performance and others. Hills (2014) did mention that majority of the respondents in a study on Causes of Test Anxiety identified poor preparation and fear of not finishing the test as major factors causing anxiety in them. There are other sources but of less significance; these are school and home.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the sources of examination anxiety among final year students based on gender*

Table 3: Results of the t-test on gender

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Male	280	15.10	2.75	598	-3.73	1.90
Female	320	14.26	2.73			

*Significant, <0.05

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in the sources of examination anxiety among final year students based on mode of entry*

Table 4: Result of the t-test on mode of entry

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Direct Entry	248	15.21	2.68			
UTME	352	15.32	2.45	598	-.51	1.96

The results in table 3 revealed that male and female final year students differed in the source of examination anxiety. This finding negates the earlier study of Olushola (2008) who established no significant difference in the causes of academic stress among tertiary institution students based on gender. The variation could be due to difference between the focus of the previous and present studies (causes of academic anxiety and sources of examination anxiety respectively). On the other hand, no significant difference was found in the sources of examination anxiety among final year students based on mode of entry. Thus, irrespective of the mode of admission into the University, final year students are similar in the sources of their examination anxiety. This corroborates the earlier findings of Cherry (2013) who mentioned that students generally expressed similar causes of test anxiety notwithstanding various peculiar characteristics. One may allude the fact that examination has nothing to do with mode of entry and thus students are generally likely to have similar dispositions to it.

Implication of the Findings

It is apparent from the findings of this study that students, especially the final year, require adequate counselling on how to prepare for examination and avoid test-related anxiety. The various examination crimes and health challenges which often characterize examination period could be traced to effects of anxiety on students. In addition, the inability of students to cover the recommended materials may be due to short span of the semesters which (if true) is not ideal for academic excellence. Thus, the services of professional counsellors become indispensable in order to guarantee adequate academic performance. The roles of seasoned educational administrator and curriculum planners have not been adequately felt, especially in the area of giving required duration for coverage of course contents. If that has been done, the level of examination anxiety among final year students could have been significantly reduced.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

- Guidance counsellors should constantly educate final year students on the best study habits and how to avoid and cope with examination anxiety. It is equally important to involve professional counsellors in the planning of the university calendar in order to enlighten the authority on the relationship between duration of session and students' ability to cope.

- Seasoned educational administrations should be assigned to constantly organize seminars for students on time management. This will assist students to prepare well ahead and use time wisely during examination.
- It is expedient that curriculum planners make positive input in the designing of syllabi and adequate time for its coverage in such a way that final year students will be able to cover the required contents and reduce examination anxiety.

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