

INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND COURSE STREAM ON EXAMINATION ANXIETY AMONG COLLEGES OF EDUCATION STUDENTS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored the influence of gender and course stream on examination anxiety among Colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was a descriptive survey design. The population for this study was all College of Education students in Kwara State which was 7,421 while the sample was 364 College of Education students drawn from the above population. Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS) was used to collect data from the respondents which was validated by five lecturers in the field of counselling psychology. Data collected were analyzed using percentages, mean and standard deviations, t-tests and analyses of Variance (ANOVA). The findings of this study show that the majority of college education students in Kwara State, Nigeria exhibited examination anxiety moderately ($F=98$, $P= 81.9\%$). The findings revealed a significant difference in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender ($t_{cal}=11.96$, $p<0.05$). The findings also found no significant difference in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course stream ($F_{cal}=0.31$, $P>0.05$). The study concludes that the majority of college of education students experienced moderate examination anxiety; while male and female college of education students were deferred in their examination anxiety level. The study recommended among other things that; the counsellors should be holding counselling programme training on examination anxiety at least once a semester. It was also recommended that counsellors should always focus on all possible factors contributing to the prevalence of examination anxiety among female students without neglecting their male counterparts.

Keywords: examination anxiety, gender, course stream

Introduction

Anxiety is not a disease or an illness but a condition that incapacitates an individual to perform or function appropriately in certain situations. It is a general notion that a certain amount of anxiety is indeed required to spur individuals into action in the context of performing a task. However, anxiety becomes a problematic experience only when an individual cannot perform his or her expected roles as a result of being overwhelmed by anxiety experience. In an examination context, high level of anxiety makes students function abnormally but it moderate level pushes them into goal accomplishment.

Causes of examination anxiety are varied by authorship of educational articles and they reflect personal and external variables with their curative approaches. Specifically, causes of examination anxiety are divided into three major categories according to Pekrun and Stephens (2015), which include: behavioural, physical and cognitive/psychological

factors. According to the above authors, behavioural factors include; inadequate rest, insufficient physical activity, poor nutrition, lack of good time management and lack of required information, procrastination, poor study habits, and poor test-taking skills among other behavioural challenges. The physical factors causing examination anxiety among students as highlighted by Nnorom et al. (2020) include pressure from peers, family and teachers, unfavourable testing environments, ineffective teaching and poor examination performance. Other significant causal factors are the cognitive and psychological causes of examination anxiety. This involves negative and irrational thoughts about the outcomes of exams and feelings of having no control over exam situations (Al-Sahman et al., 2019).

The manifestations of examination anxiety vary from one individual anxious personality to another and remain a yardstick by which professionals evaluate the level of disturbances and accommodation of this menace. Such manifestations are categorized into four major components according to Zahra et al. (2022) which are: physical, emotional, behavioural and cognitive components. According to the above author, each of these components has its distinctive signs. For example; physical manifestations include; increased heart rate, excessive sweating and headache, experiencing rapid breathing, dry mouth, fatigue, nausea and so on. Emotional component signs include; low self-esteem, low self-confidence, anger, feeling a sense of guilt, shame nervous and so on. The behavioural component signs on the other hand include; insomnia, substance abuse, withdrawal, voice trembling and body shaking among other destructive or detrimental behaviours. The cognitive component signs according to Zahra et al. (2022), include; disorganized thoughts.

Examination anxiety is a significant challenge experienced by students in tertiary institutions in which colleges of education students are not exempted. This has always been affecting college education students physically, emotionally and psychologically which might have been contributing to their academic low achievement, incompetence and poor overall well-being of students. This could also in turn, if left unattended to, obstruct the attainment of the NCE goals and the attainment of the overall educational goals of the nation. However, the extent to which factors such as gender and course stream contribute to this type of anxiety, from male to female and across the course stream of students, remains unclear. This makes it essential to examine how factors such as gender and course stream contribute to the student's examination anxiety. Therefore, this study intends to address this gap by examining the influence of gender and course stream on examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria.

The main purpose of this study was to determine the influence of gender and course stream on examination anxiety among college education students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The following were the specific purposes:

1. To examine the level of Examination Anxiety among Colleges of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria.
2. To find out Examination Anxiety among Colleges of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender.
3. To examine the Examination Anxiety among Colleges of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria the Course Streams Anxiety based on gender.

The term examination anxiety has been variously defined by authors across different disciplines. For instance, Olatoye and Afuwape (2013) defined the construct as a physiological state of mind that a candidate has before, during or after an examination or a test characterized by fear, worry, uncertainty and a sense of helplessness. Javed and Abiodullah (2021) described examination anxiety as a particular fear pattern as a response towards performance evaluation. Okogu et al. (2016) also described examination anxiety as a physiological condition in which individuals experience extreme stress, anxiety and

discomfort during or before taking an examination. By the above definitions, it is evident that examination anxiety is a state of apprehension and discomfort developed as a result of anticipatory anxiety towards an examination or test among students.

The available records have suggested a high prevalence of examination anxiety among students and Nigerian students are not exempt. Cassady (2010) stated that between 25 and 40 percent of students struggle with examination anxiety and Hamza et al. (2022) also noted between 15 and 20 percent of high school pupils have severe examination anxiety. Examination anxiety was one of the leading issues preventing good learning, affecting about 90 percent of the respondents in Rivers and Imo states (Effiom & Bassey, 2018). In another research endeavour, Anosike et al. (2022) maintained that anxiety symptoms were very common among students of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Peter (2020) noted that students had examination or test anxiety at all academic levels; this excessive dread may considerably hinder their ability to perform well in a variety of activities in the lab, in workshops and on achievement and IQ tests. There may be several different elements that contribute to examination anxiety among students.

Students may experience three types of examination anxiety depending on the cause and their circumstances. These include high, moderate and low examination anxiety. High examination anxiety includes an immediate reaction by the sufferer; while moderate examination anxiety includes mild manifestation of exam worries, and low examination anxiety does not negatively affect a student's academic performance (Kumari & Jain, 2014). In the studies of examination anxiety, Sharma and Shakir (2019) found a significantly high level of examination/academic anxiety in senior secondary school students of the type of school. Senior secondary students studying in private schools had more academic/examination anxiety in comparison to government senior secondary school students. Similarly, Putwain and Daly (2014) recorded a significant rate of student population demonstrating moderate levels of test/examination anxiety, while few students experienced either low or high levels of examination anxiety.

Research works have established, however, that certain variables such as gender and course stream otherwise known as course of study, could impact examination anxiety among students. Although, the evidence is somewhat contradictory this is expected in studies without constantly held conditions in the continuum. Núñez-Peña et al. (2016) supported that two explanations have accounted for gender differences in examination anxiety experience among students. One of these explanations maintained that females naturally are under greater pressure to succeed academically than are male counterparts, as they are more afraid of failing in an examination situation. The other explanation suggested that males are naturally more defensive than females when it comes to succumbing to anxiety experience, as doing so may be considered weak masculinity on their part. Arain (2021) and Matara and Pantu (2021) observed that there is a significant difference in examination anxiety based on gender as female subjects demonstrated a higher level of examination anxiety than their male counterparts students. Rezazadeh and Tavakoli (2009) similarly found a higher level of examination anxiety among female students in contrast to male students.

Course stream otherwise known as course of study has been also linked to the experience of examination anxiety among students. For instance, Muhammad (2020) affirmed that the course stream of a student plays a significant role in students' examination anxiety experience, and as such, previous studies had reported significant differences between the students of arts and science streams in their examination anxiety experiences. The studies of Oladipo and Ogungbamila (2013) and Macher et al. (2013), affirmed that academic level and students' faculty (course stream) have no independent and joint influence on examination anxiety. However, Butt et al. (2013) who investigated the degree of examination anxiety experienced by students of different subjects (course stream) and

study researched on level of test anxiety experienced by students of different subjects (course stream) found students of pure science encounter a significantly higher level of examination anxiety than students of social sciences which implies that females face more examination anxiety than males in contrast to the findings of this current study. Conversely, the findings of Parvez and Shakir (2014) observed that students of the Arts stream top the charts (higher) on levels of examination anxiety, stress and nervousness followed by students of the Commerce stream while a minimal measure of examination anxiety, stress and uneasiness were found among students of science stream.

Method

The type of research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey type. The population for this study comprised all students' Colleges of Education in Kwara State, Nigeria which was 7,421 (Research fieldwork, 2024). The sample for this study comprised 364 respondents drawn from the above population based on Research Advisor. A multi-stage sampling procedure comprising purposive and stratified sampling techniques was adopted in the selection process of the study. At stage 1, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select two public Colleges of Education in Kwara State. At stage 2, the respondents were stratified into moderating variables of gender, and course stream. At stage 3, the researchers used a purposive sampling method to select a total number of 364 respondents, who finally participated in the study. The instrument used for data collection in the study was tagged "Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS)". The questionnaire consists of two different sections, sections A and B. Section A of the instrument comprises demographic data of the respondents which comprise gender and course stream. Section B consists of 30 items on examination anxiety behaviours. The scale was patterned on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale as follows: Always (A) = 5; Often (O) = 4; Sometimes (S) = 3; Rarely (R) = 2; Never (1). Participants that responded to all the 30 items on the scale, had a maximum score of 150 (that is, 5 x 30) and a minimum score of 30 (that is, 1 x 30). Given this, a participant who scored between 30 -70 was considered to have "low examination anxiety"; participants between the 71-110 score range were regarded as having "moderate examination anxiety level"; while those within the 111-150 range of scores were categorized as "high examination anxiety level".

To ascertain the validity of the instrument, draft copies were presented to five seasoned lecturers in the field of Counselling psychology. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a test re-test reliability method and by this method, the instrument was administered twice at intervals of four weeks to twenty (20) students from another College of Education, who had similar characteristics with the population of the study but who were not originally part of the study. The two sets of scores obtained in this process were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, (PPMC) statistic and a co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained which confirmed that the instrument used for this study was reliable. However, data collected from the respondents were statistically analyzed, using frequency count, mean and percentage while the hypotheses formulated for the study were tested using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistics. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Result and Discussion

Table 1 *Level of Examination Anxiety among Colleges of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria.*

	Range	Frequency	Percentages %	Cumulative Percent
Low examination anxiety	31-70	49	13.5	13.5
Moderate examination anxiety	71-110	298	81.9	95.4
High examination anxiety	111-150	17	4.7	100.0
Total		364	100.0	

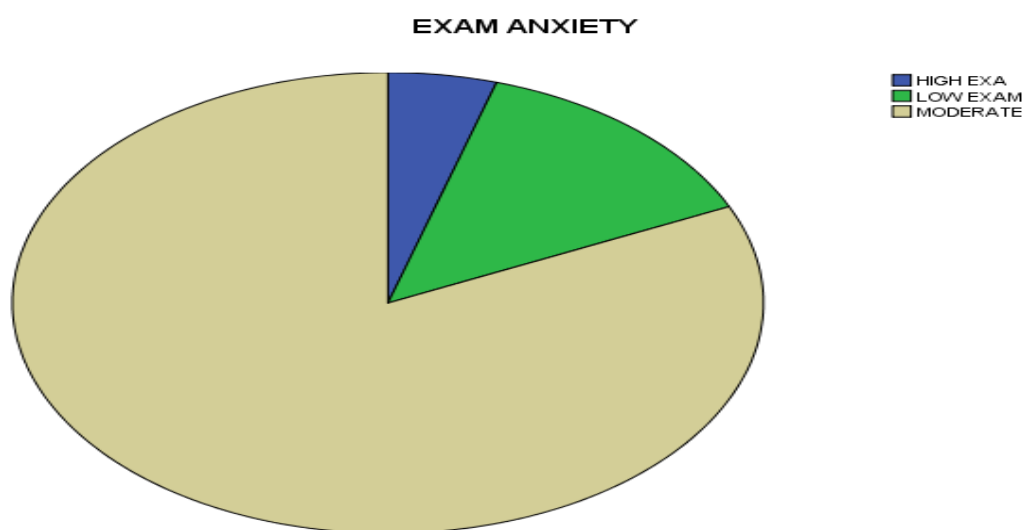


Figure 1 *Level of Examination Anxiety among Colleges of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria.*

Table 1, Figure 1 shows the level of examination anxiety among college of education students. The result shows students who fell within low level of examination anxiety (R= 30-70, F=49, P=13.5%), students who fell within moderate level of examination anxiety (R= 71-110, F=298, P=81.9%) and students who experienced high level of examination anxiety (R= 111-150, F=17, P=4.7%). Hence, the results indicate that the majority of students have moderately experienced examination anxiety (R= 71-110, F=298, P=81.9%).

Table 2 *Independent t-test of difference in the Examination Anxiety among College of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender.*

	N	Mean	Std.	Df	t	Sig.
Male	182	67.12	10.69	18	84.73	.000
Female	182	101.08	11.86	18	114.96	.000

Table 2 shows the mean in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender. The result indicates that t. calculated for males is 84.73 and females is 114.96. The significant value is 0.00 at 0.05. Since the significant value of 0.00 is less than the 0.05 level of significance (t.cal.=114.96, p.<0.05). Thus, hypothesis one is rejected. This implies that there was a significant difference in the

examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender.

Table 3 ANOVA of difference in the Examination Anxiety among College of Education Students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on Course Streams.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	517.140	4	129.285	308	.872
Within Groups	150545.300	359	419.346		
Total	151062.440	363			

Table 3 shows the mean difference of course streams on examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The result indicates that F. calculated is 0.31. The significant value is 0.87 at 0.05. Since the significant value of 0.87 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance ($F_{cal} = 0.31, p > 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis two was accepted. This implies no significant difference in the examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course streams.

Major Research Findings

Based on the research questions and tested null hypotheses:

1. It was indicated that the majority of college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria exhibited moderate levels of examination anxiety ($R = 71-110, F = 98, P = 81.9\%$).
2. It shows a significant difference in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender ($t_{cal} = 11.96, p < 0.05$).
3. This implies there was no significant difference in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course streams. That is, college of education students' examination anxiety experienced did not significantly differ across the streams ($F_{cal} = 0.31, P > 0.05$).

The results show that the majority of college education students fell within the range or moderate level of examination anxiety. This indicates that the majority of students moderately experienced examination anxiety with $R = 71-110, F = 98$ and $P = 81.9\%$. This might be linked to the fact that every individual requires little or a certain amount of anxiety to spur him/her into action. These findings corroborated the finding of Putwain and Daly (2014) who found a significant rate of student population demonstrated a moderate level of examination anxiety while few students experienced either low or high levels of examination anxiety. This finding is also in tandem with the findings of Sharma and Shakir (2019) who found students' examination anxiety moderate from both private and public schools/colleges and similarly concur with Sani (2021) who found that the majority of the universities and others tertiary institutions students possess moderate examination anxiety while very fewer students were found to have a low level of examination.

There was a significant difference in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on of gender. The results indicate that female students' examination anxiety significantly differed with $M = 67.12; SD = 10.69$ compared to the male students' examination anxiety experienced with $M = 101.08; SD = 11.82$. This implies that female college of education students significantly exhibited higher examination anxiety than their male counterparts. This could be linked to the fact that some female students experienced parental fear of female education and a higher demand for academic performance than their male counterparts' parents. This finding is supported by Arain (2021) and Kusmawaty and Eka (2021) who found significantly higher

female examination anxiety compared to male counterparts. The finding is also in line with the findings of Rezazadeh and Tavakoli (2009) that female students' examination anxiety was significantly higher in contrast to male students' examination anxiety. On the other hand, the finding is in line with Naceanceno et al. (2021) who revealed that there was no significant difference in anxiety levels among college students of different classifications or by the number of semester hours taken, but found a significant difference in the examination anxiety levels among male and female college students.

The study shows no significant difference in the examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course stream. This implies that course stream had no strong influence on the college of education students' examination anxiety. This result could be that the problem of examination anxiety cuts across all the course streams with similarities in tasks required for learning achievement across the course streams. This finding corroborated previous findings of Macher et al. (2013) who found no significant difference in examination anxiety among students from the Sciences stream of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics. The findings are also in line with the findings of Oladipo and Ogungbamila (2013), who affirmed that students' examination anxiety did not differ across the streams. However, the findings are in contrast with previous findings of Yahya et al. (2013), who found students' examination anxiety significantly differs based on their course stream. These authors further affirmed that examination anxiety exhibited by students from the Sciences stream was significantly higher than those students from the Social Sciences stream.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the majority of college education students experienced examination anxiety moderately while fewer or few either exhibited higher or lower examination anxiety. A significant difference was found in the examination anxiety among colleges of education students in Kwara, Nigeria based on gender. The study concluded no significant difference in the examination anxiety among college of education students in Kwara State, Nigeria based on course stream. Based on the conclusion, the study recommended that: counsellors should be holding counselling programme training on examination anxiety at least once a semester. This will assist students with moderate and high examination anxiety levels to meliorate their exhibiting behaviour (examination anxiety) and keep up with students with low examination anxiety without deteriorating from their current status. College counsellors should always focus on all possible factors contributing to the prevalence of examination anxiety among female students without neglecting the concern of males as well. College management and lectures should create an enabling environment by ensuring all students across the course streams always participating and benefiting from every counselling intervention programme on examination anxiety. College counsellors should address moderate and high examination anxiety among students, regardless of gender or course stream, as it has physical, psychological and emotional consequences. The study was limited to Kwara State colleges, excluding students from other states and tertiary institutions like Polytechnics and university undergraduates. It also excluded longitudinal studies and did not consider other variables like age, religion, and academic level as moderating variables. Future researchers should expand their scope to include Polytechnics students and university undergraduates, and consider longitudinal studies and moderating variables for a comprehensive investigation of examination anxiety.

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