



### **Patterns of Examination Anxiety among Secondary School Students in Saki-west Local Government Area, Oyo State**

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#### ***Abstract***

Academic anxiety is a common issue that students cannot ignore if they want to achieve success in life. If academic anxiety is not properly addressed, it can have many serious, severe and long-lasting consequences on students' academic activities. This study therefore investigated patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State. The study adopted descriptive survey research. The population of this study comprised all secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area of Oyo State, while a sample of 200 respondents participated in the study. The sample was selected using simple random technique. A questionnaire entitled "Patterns of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire" (PEAQ) was used to collect data for the study. The variables taken into consideration were gender, and age. Percentages were used for demographic data, mean and rank order analysis was used for the main research question while the null hypotheses postulated were tested using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical techniques at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the main patterns of examination anxiety are worry about failure during an examination; fear crept into their heart when they hear of an examination; and hearts beat faster during the examination period. It was also revealed that there were significant differences in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender and age. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that school counsellors should equip students with skills on preparation for examination and coping with examination anxiety in order assist them to overcome examination challenges.

**Keywords:** patterns, examination, anxiety, students

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## ***Introduction***

When students enroll in schools it is understood that they will undergo examinations in order to measure how much they are learning. In fact, almost all schools use formal examination situations and examinations in order to assess students' progress throughout the years. Unfortunately for some students, the high-stakes decisions that are made based on these formal examinations can put so much pressure on them that they develop test anxiety.

It is normal for every individual in life to feel panic, anxious or fearful about situations at one time or the other. For instance, one may be afraid of failure or worries about school sometimes, as well as big tests, major projects, or a "scary teacher" among others. Usually, one feels calm and better after some period of time. In a situation however, where anxiety towards something becomes persistent, it then becomes a disorder. Barlow and David (2002) referred to anxiety as a forecasted state of mood, where an individual gets ready to deal with a negative event of the future. Therefore, anxiety is a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension and worrying (Chowdhury, 2019).

Anxiety is characterized by a sense of overwhelming and apprehension. It is a diffuse, vague and unpleasant sense of sadness accompanied by autonomic symptoms such as palpitation, headache, sweating and gastric discomfort leading to overall unrest. A victim of anxiety usually feels frightened, nervous, depressed, has difficulty sleeping and eating, and is unable to concentrate on things. They may also feel tired and irritable, have a dry mouth, experience trembling and faintness and have stomach cramps or diarrhea (Young Mind, 2015).

When a student exhibits one or more of these symptoms persistently towards educational or academics activities and programmes, then he/she could be regarded as experiencing academic anxiety. Academic anxiety refers to disruptive thought patterns and physiological responses and behaviours that follow from concern about an unacceptable poor performance on an academic task. Academic anxiety is a kind of state anxiety which relates to the impending danger from the environment of academic institutions including teachers, and certain subjects like Mathematics and English (Rohen, 2012). According to Adegboyega (2020), academic anxiety is a broad term for a collection of anxieties that are experienced in schools. The most common types include test anxiety, math anxiety, computer anxiety, and reading anxiety among others.

Studies (Myers, 2007; Omosidi & Adigun, 2014) have reported that anxiety plays a significant role in students' learning and academic performance. Anxiety can enhance or mar the performance of students in the school system depending on the rate or level of experience. Myers (2007) stated that anxiety can improve learning and achievements,

provided it is at a mild level. Myers (2007) opined that anxiety is hampering for students' academic achievements which may be caused by frequent changing of schools, parents divorcing or even the pressure of work. Academic performance can badly be affected by severe anxiety, which can then cause psychological problems. In females, it may cause academic failure while in males it may also be a reason for disruptive behavioural problems along with academic failure (Ameringen, Allgulander, Bandelow & Greist, 2003).

Academic demands, helplessness, inability to cope, mental tension, exams and work load among others, have been considered the major causes of academic anxiety among students (Shaikh, Kahloon, Kazim, Khalid, Nawaz & Khan, 2004). During such situations, the students overemphasize the negative results and consider themselves as helpless individuals (Zeidner, 2008). Academic anxiety is not only due to tests or surrounding examinations; rather it includes a number of factors like a given subject, language, studying, reading and others (Cassady, 2010). Nicholson (2009) studied the anxiety of students in Grade 11 and found that there was a close association between anxiety and academic achievements.

Among the concepts that characterized academic anxiety is achievement anxiety, which is a fear of failure in an academic setting that arises when parents, teachers or the student's own expectations exceeds what the student believes he/she can realistically achieve. Sources of achievement anxiety include failure to satisfy ambitious or overly critical parents' expectations in early childhood as well as early exposure to overachieving siblings or peers (Adegboyega, 2020). Seeing others receive praise and rewards for their achievements can give students a false impression of what teachers and parents expect of them.

A test or examination also forms an academic anxiety problem. Zollar and Ben-chain's (2000) described today's school system of evaluation as being turned into a test-conscious age in which the lives of many people are not only greatly influenced, but are also determined by their test performance. Therefore, the uses of the end-of-semester examination results and its inherent implications appear to have placed a huge responsibility on the student. Ashaolu (2001) also stated that tests and examinations at all stages of education, especially at higher education levels have been considered an important and powerful tool for decision making in this competitive society, with people of all ages being evaluated with respect to their achievements, skills and abilities; such tests and examinations come with it, stress, which is thought to prevent some individuals from reaching their academic potential.

Crystal, Rebecca, Robert, Lay, Isabella, Vivien and Wan (2008) found that academic anxiety highly influences students' performance. Students with more anxiety have low self-efficacy and hence they have lesser abilities of self-regulated learning and

vice versa. Academic stress also hinders the expectations of students up to a significant extent. Subject anxiety is closely associated with individual differences. It has been established that the age and gender of students influences subject anxiety. When college students were analyzed for the subject of statistics, it was revealed that age is a significant correlate of the anxiety regarding the subject of statistics, where the older students were found more anxious than the younger ones (Mustafa, 2003). According to Putwain (2009), a percentage of 25-40 of students face academic anxiety where female students are prevailing.

Academic anxiety has strongly been linked with emotional depression. Nelson and Harwood (2011) noted that the anxiety modifies the study behaviours of students. When students were analyzed for their anxieties and academic scores, an inverse relation was found between anxiety and students' GPA. Similarly, students with more anxiety were found with poorer study habits and those with low anxiety were found with good study habits in contrast. Also, people with anxiety usually have difficulty storing and retrieving information. According to Putwain (2009), academic anxiety in children and adolescents can influence personal, social and academic skills. Poor academic performance can in turn lead to the severity of anxiety which can in turn lead to low self-esteem and other personal and social problems, thus enhancing a self-maintaining cycle.

Studies have established the influence of moderating variables of gender and school type on examination anxiety among students. The study of Hembree (2008) 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 the subject variable of gender was correlated with some aspects of test anxiety where female learners felt more worried and anxious than their male counterparts. Olushola's (2008) finding revealed 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 a testing situation has been identified by psychologists as a determinant of academic performance. Culler and Holahan (2000) and 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 tasks than less test anxious subjects especially when performance condition is evaluative. During a 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 that the 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, not only before but especially during the administration of the test. According to the findings, test anxiety gives rise to physical and psychological problems.

Studies by McDonald (2001) and 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 and 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. It is against this background that this study aims at investigating the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Academic anxiety is a common issue that students cannot ignore if they want to achieve success in life. If academic anxiety is not properly addressed, it can have many serious, severe and long-lasting consequences such as causing a student to start hating a subject or a teacher, they may begin to procrastinate, tell lies to their parents, perform poorly on school work, play truancy and withdraw from relating with peers or friends. They may also drop out of school (Ezenwa, 2006).

Most students do not recognize their anxiety for what it is, and instead think there is something “wrong” with them. Some are preoccupied with the physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g., stomach aches, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, etc.). Others may think they are weird, weak, or even going crazy. Unfortunately, these thoughts only make students feel even more determined and self-conscious. Academic anxiety can cause students to rush through tests, so they end up doing poorly on them. It can also cause “achievement stress” that will continue to follow them on their academic path (Akinsola & Nwajei, 2013).

Relevant studies have done relating to the focus of this study. For instance, Omosidi and Adigun (2014) reported on patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis. The study found that the major patterns of examination anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Ilorin metropolis are worry, faster heartbeats, fear, restlessness and sweat before and during examinations. Others such as 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 while Ali, Rao, Ali, Ahmed, Safi, Malik and Husan (2014) worked on the prevalence of anxiety and depression and their associated risk factors among Engineering students in Karachi, Pakistan. The study revealed a greater prevalence of anxiety and depression (73.8%) among students. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki-west Local Government Area, Oyo state.

### ***Research Question***

This research question was raised and answered in the study:

- What are the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State?

### ***Research Hypotheses***

The following null hypotheses are postulated and tested in this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on age.

## ***Methods***

The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. It is a design employed to describe vividly the status of an event or phenomenon. Ezenwa (2006) defined the descriptive survey method as a process of collecting data in order to test an hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. This method was considered appropriate because the study collected relevant information from respondents on the patterns of academic anxiety through the use of a questionnaire.

The population of the study comprised all secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area of Oyo State while the target population consisted of secondary school students from various selected secondary schools in Saki West LGA. The researchers choose the secondary school students because they engage in examination just like every student. Therefore, two hundred secondary school students constituted the sample for this study. Ezenwa (2006) defined the sample as the selected group which acted as a fair representative of the population of interest.

The procedure that was used in selecting the sample for the study is a two-stage sampling technique. At stage one, a random sampling technique (a dip-hat method) was used to select ten secondary schools in Saki West LGA. Random sampling gives all secondary schools in Saki West LGA an equal chance to participate in the study. At stage 2, random sampling was again adopted to select twenty students from each of the schools. The selected students were then stratified based on gender, and age. Therefore, a total of 200 (20x10) respondents participated in the study.

The instrument used for this study was a researchers-designed questionnaire entitled “Patterns of Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (PEAQ)”. The questionnaire consisted of two sections (A & B). The first part contained the demographic information of the respondents. Section B contained 20 items on patterns of examination anxiety. The researchers used a Four Point Likert-type rating scale format to score each item of the instrument. The rating was in the following order:

|                   |      |            |
|-------------------|------|------------|
| Strongly Agree    | (SA) | = 4 points |
| Agree             | (A)  | = 3 points |
| Disagree          | (D)  | = 2 points |
| Strongly Disagree | (SD) | = 1 point  |



An instrument is said to be valid when it measures accurately what is designed to measure. It describes the extent to which the instrument can be relied upon to do what it is purported to do accurately (Ibrahim, Laudu and Opadokun, 2004). In order to ascertain the validity of the instrument, copies of the questionnaire forms were given to the experts in education for vetting. The suggestions made were appropriately incorporated and adjudged the instrument suitable for the study.

In order determine the reliability of the instrument; a test re-test reliability method was adopted. The questionnaire forms were administered to twenty secondary school students, who were not part of the sample for the study but possessed similar characteristics of the sample. After an interval of three weeks, the same questionnaire forms were re-administered on the same group of students. The two sets of scores obtained differently on the two occasions were correlated using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation ( $r$ ) statistical method and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained which made the instrument suitable for the study.

The data analyses of the study were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The result obtained from the demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage, while the data obtained from Section B was analyzed using means score and inferential statistics of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test statistical tools to test the postulated null hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

Research Question 1: What are the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State?

**Table 1: Mean and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' View on the Patterns of Examination Anxiety among Secondary School Students**

| Item No. | As far as I know, during examination students          | Mean | Rank            |
|----------|--|------|-----------------|
| 1        | do worry about failure during examination              | 3.16 | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| 6        | fear crept into their heart when hear of examination   | 3.08 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> |
| 9        | sweat profusely under examination condition            | 2.96 | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |
| 15       | always experience depression during examination period | 2.92 | 4 <sup>th</sup> |
| 10       | heart beat faster during examination period            | 2.84 | 5 <sup>th</sup> |

|    |   |      |                  |
|----|---|------|------------------|
| 18 | become restless when examination date is announced                                | 2.70 | 6 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 7  | become indecisive during examination  | 2.65 | 7 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 5  | think of negative things before and during examination                            | 2.65 | 7 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 20 | usually dress shabbily during examination   | 2.63 | 9 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 19 | usually become fidgeting (continuous movement of the body) during examination     | 2.58 | 10 <sup>th</sup> |
| 3  | memory usually becomes dull under examination                                     | 2.53 | 11 <sup>th</sup> |
| 4  | hardly remember all they have read during examination                             | 2.48 | 12 <sup>th</sup> |
| 2  | urinate often during examination  | 2.45 | 13 <sup>th</sup> |
| 14 | stomach disorder is one of the problem they used to experience during examination | 2.44 | 14 <sup>th</sup> |
| 17 | usually bite their finger nails during examination                                | 2.43 | 15 <sup>th</sup> |
| 12 | usually experience dry mouth during examination                                   | 2.39 | 16 <sup>th</sup> |
| 11 | usually become ill having heard of examination date                               | 2.32 | 17 <sup>th</sup> |
| 8  | experience sleep disorder during examination                                      | 2.07 | 18 <sup>th</sup> |
| 16 | usually become freezing up during examination                                     | 2.05 | 19 <sup>th</sup> |
| 13 | always develop sudden diarrhea before or during examination                       | 1.80 | 20 <sup>th</sup> |

Table 1 presents the mean and rank order analysis of the respondents' view on the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students. The table indicates that item 1 which states that during examination students "do worry about failure during examination" conflict ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.16. Items 6 which states that "fear crept into their heart when hear of examination" ranked 2nd with the mean scores of 3.08. Ranked 3rd is item 10 which states that "heart beat faster during examination period" with the mean score of 2.96. Likewise, items 8, 16 and 13 which state that during examination students: "experience sleep disorder during examination", "usually become freezing up during examination" and "always develop sudden diarrhea before or during examination" ranked 18th, 19th and 20th respectively with mean scores of 2.07, 2.05 and 1.80 respectively. Since eleven out of twenty items have the mean scores of 2.50 and above, then it can be said that respondents' patterns of examination are worry about failure during examination; fear crept into their heart when hear of examination; heart beat faster during examination period; sweat profusely under examination condition; always experience depression during examination period among others.

### ***Hypotheses Testing***

Four null hypotheses were postulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender.

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the Respondents' View on the Patterns of Examination Anxiety among Secondary School Students Based on Gender**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Cal. t-value</b> | <b>Crit. t-value</b> | <b>p-value</b> |
|---------------|----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Male          | 90       | 47.32       | 15.43     | 198       | 4.03*               | 1.96                 | .000           |
| Female        | 110      | 54.15       | 7.93      |           |                     |                      |                |

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 4.03 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on age.

**Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Respondents' View on the Patterns of Examination Anxiety among Secondary School Students Based on Age**

| Source         | SS       | df  | Mean Squares | Cal. F-ratio | Crit. F-ratio | p-value |
|----------------|----------|-----|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Between Groups | 3884.05  | 2   | 1942.02      | 14.44*       | 3.00          | .000    |
| Within Groups  | 26478.66 | 197 | 134.40       |              |               |         |
| Total          | 30362.72 | 199 |              |              |               |         |

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the calculated F-ratio of 14.44 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis two is rejected. Hence there is significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on age. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 4.

**Table 4: Scheffe post-hoc where the Significant Difference lies Based on Age**

| Years              | N   | Sub set for Alpha = 0.05 |       |
|--------------------|-----|--------------------------|-------|
|                    |     | 1                        | 2     |
| 10-13 years        | 57  | 44.12                    |       |
| 18 years and above | 17  |                          | 52.71 |
| 14-17 years        | 126 |                          | 54.01 |
| Sig.               |     | 1.000                    | .894  |

Table 4 shows that respondents whose age were between 10-13 years had the mean score of 44.12 (in subset 1) while 18 years and above and between 14-17 years had a mean score of 52.71 and 54.01 (in subset 2) respectively. This implies that the mean scores of respondents whose age 18 years and above and between 14-17 years are greater than the mean scores other age group, thus, contributed to the significant difference.

## ***Discussion***

The study revealed that the main patterns of examination anxiety are worry about failure during examination; fear crept into their heart when hear of examination; heart beat faster during examination period. The finding of the study is in line with the study of Ballow (2005) who 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. The findings of this study is similar with the findings of Spencer (2012) which highlighted that 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.

. Another finding indicated that there was a significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender. This implies that male and female respondents were different in their expression on the patterns of examination anxiety. The finding of this study supports the finding of Olatoye and Afuwape (2003) who found significant difference between male and female students' level of anxiety. Female students are more anxious than the male counterparts. Personality differences of individual students might have been responsible for this finding.

Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on age. This implies that respondents were different in their expression based on age on the patterns of examination anxiety. The result of Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who were 18 years and above and those between 14-17 years contributed to the significant difference. This finding supports the study of Olatoye (2002) also noted that the variables of age of students have influence their anxiety especially during examinations. This could be that respondents who were 18 years and above and those between 14-17 years were mature enough to know what examination entails.

### ***Conclusion***

It was concluded that the main patterns of examination anxiety are worry about failure during examination; fear crept into their heart when hear of examination; heart beat faster during examination period; sweat profusely under examination condition; always experience depression during examination period among others. It was also revealed that there were significant differences in the patterns of examination anxiety among secondary school students in Saki West Local Government Area, Oyo State based on gender and age.

### ***Implication for Counselling***

The findings of this study have implications for counselling practice. The study revealed that main patterns of examination anxiety are worry about failure during examination; fear crept into their heart when hear of examination; heart beat faster during examination period; sweat profusely under examination condition; always experience depression during examination period among others. The implications of the findings are that school managers and counsellors need to provide support services to students in order to assist them to overcome examination anxiety. School counsellors should intensify their efforts in training students on effective study habits, help to build their interest in the school course, and expose them to activities that could improve their thinking process in order to relieve academic anxiety. School counsellors can use cognitive behavioural therapy for students experiencing depression during examinations in order to assist them overcome their fear of failure.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The school counsellors should equip students with skills in preparation for examinations and coping with examination anxiety in order assist them to overcome examination challenges.
2. 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.
3. The teachers should regularly teach students to be mentally and academically prepared for examinations so as to handle examination conditions effectively.

4. 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.

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