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The influence of anxiety on undergraduate students examination taking behaviour in the universities of south-east geopolitical zone

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Abstract

The study addressed the issue of the influence of anxiety on undergraduate students' examination taking-behaviour in the universities of South-East Geopolitical zone. Today testing has become an inherent part of the society, and many important decisions are based on test results. Therefore anxiety during test has become a prominent problem in schools. The study focused primarily on the influence of anxiety on students' behaviour in taking examination in the universities. Specifically, to find out influence of anxiety on students' - examination misconduct, physical behaviour and emotional behaviour in taking examinations. The study was guided by three (3) research questions and three (3) hypotheses. The population of the study comprised all the government owned universities in the South-East geopolitical zone. The sample was 240 students from psychology departments of the selected universities. Purposive sampling was used. The primary instrument for data collection was a set of structured questionnaire and rating scale. Findings revealed that the major ways anxiety influence student's examination taking behaviour included – misconduct (malpractice), physical behaviour and emotional behaviour. The study showed that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct (malpractice), students' physical behaviour, emotional behaviour in taking examination. Based on the findings, a good number of recommendations were made on the way out.

Keywords: Influence, anxiety, undergraduate, examination and behaviour

Introduction

Students are subjected to increasing number of tests and assessments right from the early stages in their lives in tertiary institutions (Wang, 2013) ^[9]. In general, the outcomes of the examinations are used to measure students' knowledge and skills as important academic areas. Based on students' performance on the examinations, important decisions are taken regarding educational opportunities, scholarships and promotions.

Anxiety is a phenomenon that people frequently encounter in their daily lives. It can be described as the tense on settling anticipation of a threatening but vague event, a feeling of uneasy suspense (Rachman, 2004) ^[7]. Examination anxiety is a little nervousness before a test or an examination. Cherry (2012) ^[1] defined examination anxiety as a combination of physiological over-arousal, tension and somatic symptoms along with worry, dread, fear of failure and catastrophizing that occurs before or during test situations. It is a physiological condition in which people experience extreme stress and discomfort during and/or before taking a test or examination. This anxiety creates significant barriers to learning and performance of students. Damer & Melendres (2011) ^[3] labelled it as anticipatory stress, situational stress or evaluational stress. This shows that some anxieties are normal and often helpful to stay mentally and physically alert. For example, when one experiences too much anxiety, however, it can result in emotional or physical distress, difficulty in concentrating, and emotional worry. Inferior performance arises not because of intellectual problems or poor academic preparation, but because testing situations create a sense of threat for those experiencing test anxieties resulting from the sense threat then, disrupts attention and memory function.

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Putwain, Woods and Symes (2010) ^[6] categorized examination anxiety as follows:

- a. Physical symptoms of test anxiety – like headache, tension, nausea, diarrhea, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, knot in the stomach, light headedness and feeling fainting all occur. Test anxiety can lead to panic attack, which is the abrupt onset of intense fear or discomfort in which individuals may feel like they were unable to breath or having a heart attack.
- b. Emotional/behavioural symptoms of test anxiety – include feelings of anger, fear, panic, restlessness, nervous, continual doubt, helplessness and disappointment are common emotional responses to examination or test anxiety.
- c. Behavioural/Cognitive symptoms of test anxiety – difficulty in concentrating or organizing thoughts, thinking negatively and comparing one's self to others, indecisive about an answer, and going blank are common symptoms of examination anxiety.

This is in accordance with who remarked that 'examination malpractice is any irregular behaviour exhibited by a candidate or anybody charged with the conduct before, during or after the examination that contravenes the rules and regulations governing the conduct of such examination'. Majority of students face serious stress towards examinations and such affect their behaviours – physical and emotional in taking examinations. However, the outcomes of some of these examinations may not be the clear pictures of the students' knowledge because of the examination anxiety. While some students face these examinations with average degree of nervousness, some students find it difficult to adjust very much to the examination conditions and as a result experience moderate to serious uneasiness, apprehension or nervousness, which could be detrimental to their performances in such examinations. Cizek and Burg (2006) ^[2], and Young (1999) ^[8] added that an optimal level of arousal is necessary for a candidate to best complete a task such as an examination performance or competitive event. However, when the anxiety or level of arousal exceeds that optimum, the result is a decline in performance. Thus students who have consistent examination anxiety may likely perform poorly in their examinations. Today, students' behaviour during taking examination poses a problem to the universities. The anxiety they face affected students physical and emotional behaviour in taking examination. Also the effect of anxiety makes the students to engage in different kinds of examination misconduct such as examination malpractices, making noise in examination halls; and other negative vices while taking examinations. It also makes students not to concentrate in what they are reading, in such cases; they carry unauthorised aids to examination halls. From the foregoing, could it be said that there is no remedy to remove or reduce the extent of students' anxiety on examination taking-behaviour in the universities? Does it mean that students and teachers do not know the causes of anxiety as it affects examination taking behaviour? It is against this background that the researchers seek to look into the causes of anxiety as it affects students' examination misconducts, physical and emotional behaviour.

The study addressed the issue of the influence of anxiety on undergraduate students' examination taking-behaviours in the universities of South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria,

the influence of anxiety as it affects students' behaviour in taking examination.

The purpose of the study is to identify the influence of anxiety on students' behaviour in taking examination in the university. Specifically the study sought to:

- Find out influence of anxiety on students' examination misconduct.
- Examine the influence of anxiety on students' physical behaviour in taking examination.
- Find out the influence of anxiety on students' emotional behaviour in taking examination.
- The study was guided by the following research questions.
- How does anxiety influence students' examination misconduct behaviour in taking examination?
- To what extent does anxiety affect students' physical behaviour in taking examination?
- In what way does anxiety influence students' emotional behaviour in taking examination?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct.
2. There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and student physical behaviour in taking examination.
3. There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' emotional behaviour in taking examination.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. This is a research procedure which seeks data from respondents and relates same to already anticipated variables. It obtains information, reports them as they are and have them further analyzed. The population of the study consisted of all government owned universities in the South-East Geopolitical zone totalling Ten (10) universities in the five states and all psychology students in each of the universities totalling 13,693 students. The study sampled four universities in the South-East Geopolitical zone; (two from Imo State and two from Abia State) respectively. The sample comprised of 200 levels Psychology students. A total number of 60 students each were sampled from each of the Universities selected totalling 240 students. The study adopted purposive sampling techniques. This is to ensure that the variables of the study are contained in the sample and also time-frame factor.

The instrument used for data collection was a set of questionnaire. The instrument was validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation department and two experts in educational field. The instrument was tested and re-tested by the researchers within an interval of two weeks on psychology students in one of the universities in the South-West geopolitical zone. The test-retest correlation coefficient between the first and the second administrations were computed with the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. Data were analyzed using mean scores to answer research questions and Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses. The decisions were made at 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Findings

Research Question 1: How does anxiety influence students' examination misconduct behaviour in taking examination?

Students indicated different ways anxiety influence their misconduct behaviour in taking examination. The responses were analyzed and presented on the table that follows.

Table 1: Mean Rating of Anxiety on Students' Examination Misconduct Behaviour in Taking Examination

| S/N | Item How does anxiety influence students' examination misconduct behaviour in taking examination? | Total Score | \bar{X} | Result |
|-----|---|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Makes students to practice giraffing in examination halls. | 690 | 2.88 | +positive |
| 2 | Copying in examination halls. | 760 | 3.17 | +positive |
| 3 | Students intimidating teachers and invigilators with dangerous weapon in examination halls. | 420 | 1.75 | -negative |
| 4 | Use of missiles or bullet in examination halls. | 520 | 2.16 | -negative |
| 5 | Students employ use of scientific malpractice such as organizers, mobile phones in examination halls. | 700 | 2.9 | +positive |
| 6 | Making noise in examination halls and smuggling out question papers out of the examination hall. | 730 | 3.04 | +positive |
| 7 | Students exchange answer booklets for note comparison. | 490 | 2.04 | -negative |
| 8 | Students engage in bribing the teachers or supervisors. | 570 | 2.38 | -negative |
| 9 | Students engage in use of inscription or Tattoo by writing key points on their body parts. | 710 | 2.96 | +positive |
| 10 | Students hire mercenary to examination halls. | 560 | 2.33 | -negative |

Data presented and analyzed on table 1 showed major ways anxiety influence student's misconduct/malpractice behaviour in taking examinations in the universities to include: students giraffing in examination halls, copying in examination halls, use of scientific malpractice such as organizer, mobile phones etc. Others included making noise in examination and smuggling out question papers and answer scripts out of examination halls and make use of

inscription or tattoo by writing key points on their body parts. These factors were rated up to and above the instrument mean (\bar{X}) of 2.5 and were therefore considered highly practiced.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct.

Table 2: Summary of Relationship between Students' Anxiety and Students Examination Misconduct (Malpractice)

| Variable | No | R | t-cal | t-tab | df | Alpa level | Result |
|--|-----|------|-------|-------|-----|------------|--------------------------|
| Students' anxiety | 240 | 0.72 | 16 | 1.96 | 239 | 0.05 | Significant relationship |
| Students' examination misconduct (malpractice) | | | | | | | |

From table 2, the result of the r-test showed that the calculated t-value (t-cal) is 16 whereas the table t-value (t-tab) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. This indicated that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct (malpractice). As a result of this, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 2: To what extent does anxiety affect students' physical behaviour in taking examination?

Students indicated the extent in which anxiety affects their physical behaviour in taking examination. The responses were analyzed and presented on the table that follows.

Table 3: Mean Rating On The Extent Of Anxiety On Students' Physical Behaviour In Taking Examination.

| S/N | Items To what extent does anxiety affect students' physical behaviour in taking examination? | Total Score | \bar{X} | Result |
|-----|--|-------------|-----------|------------|
| 11 | Low concentration when preparing for examination. | 700 | 2.9 | +ve extent |
| 12 | Frequently tense that stomach gets upset causing diarrhea and nausea. | 730 | 3.04 | +ve Extent |
| 13 | Feel fainting and at times fainted. | 730 | 2.96 | +ve Extent |
| 14 | Rapid heartbeat / fast breathing. | 710 | 2.9 | +ve Extent |
| 15 | Fall sick days before an examination. | 730 | 3.04 | +ve Extent |
| 16 | Inability to settle down. | 730 | 3.04 | +ve Extent |
| 17 | Frequently get nervous and forget facts already known and low morale and tendency to make more mistakes. | 700 | 2.9 | +ve Extent |
| 18 | Experience panic attack. | 690 | 2.88 | +ve Extent |
| 19 | Student develop serious headache. | 690 | 2.88 | +ve Extent |
| 20 | Sweat excessively or profusely. | 650 | 2.71 | +ve Extent |

The analysis of data presented on table 3 showed the extent anxiety influence students' physical behaviour in taking examination. They included developing low concentration when preparing for examination, frequent tense that stomach gets upset causing diarrhea and nausea, feel fainting and at times fainted, rapid heartbeat/fast breathing, fall sick days before an examination, inability to settle down, frequently get nervous and forget facts already known and low morale and tendency to make more mistakes, experience panic

attack, develop serious headache and sweat excessively or profusely. These factors were rated up to and above the instruments mean (X) of 2.5 and were therefore considered highly.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' physical behaviour in taking examination.

Table 4: Summary of Relationship between Students' Anxiety and Students' Physical Behaviour in Taking Examination

| Variable | No | R | t-cal | t-tab | Df | Alpa level | Result |
|------------------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-----|------------|--------------------------|
| Students' anxiety | 240 | 0.71 | 15.55 | 1.96 | 239 | 0.05 | Significant relationship |
| Students' physical behaviour | | | | | | | |

From table 4, the result of the r-test showed that the calculated t-value (t-cal) is 15.55 whereas the table t-value (t-tab) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. This indicated that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and student physical behaviour in taking examination. As a result of this, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 3: In what way does anxiety influence students' emotional behaviour in taking examination?

The respondents indicated the ways in which anxiety influence students' emotional behaviour in taking examination. The analysis and results of their responses are pointed on the table that follows.

Table 5: Mean Rating on Ways Anxiety Influence Student's Emotional Behaviour in Taking Examination.

| S/N | Items In what way does anxiety influence students' emotional behaviour in taking examination? | Total Score | \bar{X} | Result |
|-----|--|-------------|-----------|------------|
| 21 | Students feel anxious when prepared for examination. | 200 | 2.9 | + positive |
| 22 | Students have tendency to rely on other students and cheat in examinations. | 716 | 2.98 | +positive |
| 23 | They experience helplessness and disappointment if they do not prepare well before taking examination. | 520 | 2.16 | -negative |
| 24 | Students experience restlessness. | 730 | 3.04 | +positive |
| 25 | Students always have feeling of anger. | 700 | 2.9 | +positive |
| 26 | They experience nervousness. | 650 | 2.71 | +positive |
| 27 | Students have continual doubt of their ability. | 420 | 1.75 | -negative |
| 28 | Students feel very panicky. | 650 | 2.71 | +positive |
| 29 | Students always have fear of failure. | 730 | 2.96 | +positive |
| 30 | Students usually get depressed. | 690 | 2.88 | +positive |

Data presented and analyzed in table 5 showed that students feel anxious when prepared for examination, have tendency to rely on other students and cheat in examinations, experience restlessness, always have feeling of anger, and experience nervousness. Others included students feeling panicky, always have fear of failure and usually get depressed. These emotional influences were rated up to and

above the instruments mean (X) of 2.5 and were therefore considered important.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' emotional behaviour in taking examination.

Table 6: Summary of Relationship Between Student' Anxiety And Students' Emotional Behaviour In Taking Examination

| Variable | No | R | t-cal | t-tab | Df | Alpa level | Result |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-----|------------|--------------------------|
| Students' anxiety | 240 | 0.70 | 15.17 | 1.96 | 239 | 0.05 | Significant relationship |
| Students' emotional behaviour | | | | | | | |

From table 6, the result of the r-test showed that the calculated t-value (t-cal) is 15.17 whereas the table t-value (t-tab) at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. This indicated that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' emotional behaviour in taking examination. As a result of this, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The study found that:

1. The major ways anxiety influence student's misconduct/malpractice behaviour in taking examinations in the universities to include: students' girafing in examination halls, copying in examination halls, use of scientific malpractice such as organizer,

mobile phones. Others included making noise in examination and smuggling out question papers and answer scripts out of examination halls and make use of inscription or tattoo by writing key points on their body parts. These factors were rated up to and above the instrument mean (X) of 2.5 and were therefore considered significant. Showing that those factors were influenced by anxiety.

2. The extent anxiety influence students' physical behaviour in taking examination includes developing low concentration when preparing for examination, frequent tense that stomach gets upset causing diarrhea and nausea, feel fainting and at times fainted, rapid

- heartbeat/fast breathing, fall sick days before an examination, inability to settle down, frequently get nervous and forget facts already known and low morale and tendency to make more mistakes, experience panic attack, develop serious headache and sweat excessively or profusely. These factors were rated up to and above the instruments mean of 2.5 and were therefore considered highly practiced.
3. Students feel anxious when prepared for examination, have tendency to depend on other students and cheat in examinations, experience restlessness, always have feeling of anger, and experience nervousness. Others included students feeling panicky, always have fear of failure and usually get depressed. These emotional influences were rated up to and above the instruments mean of 2.5 which shows significant practiced. All these are as a result of anxiety.
 4. There is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct (malpractice).
 5. There is significant relationship between students' anxiety and student physical behaviour in taking examination.
 6. There is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' emotional behaviour in taking examination.

Discussion of Findings

Anxiety influence on student's examination misconduct behaviour in taking examination

The study revealed in table 1 that the major ways anxiety influence student's misconduct/malpractice behaviour in taking examinations in the universities included students' girafing in examination halls, copying in examination halls, use of scientific malpractice such as organizer, mobile phones etc. Others included making noise in examination and smuggling out question papers and answer scripts out of examination halls and make use of inscription or tattoo by writing key points on their body parts. These factors were rated up to and above the instrument mean (X) of 2.5 and therefore considered important. The study revealed that examination or test anxiety has so many negative effects on students. Students are likely to enter into different vices if not properly handled at the on set. This is in accordance with that identified the effects of anxiety on students to include examination malpractice. He also said that examination malpractice is a social vice that is viewed as the bane of the Nigerian school system. It is the act of going contrary to the rules and regulations guiding the conducting of examinations. Also, Jekayinta (2006) [5] opined that examination malpractice manifest in different forms including leakages, impersonation, external assistance, smuggling of foreign materials, copying, collusion, substitution of scripts, teachers assistance, ghost centers, marker malpractice (sorting, arbitral award of marks), use of hand sets, writing on body part, use of signs and symbols and teaching malpractices. It was showed on table 2 that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' examination misconduct (malpractice).

The extent of anxiety on students' physical behaviour in taking examination

The study on table 3 also revealed the extent anxiety influence students' physical behaviour in taking examination includes developing low concentration when

preparing for examination, frequent tense that stomach gets upset causing diarrhea and nausea, feel fainting and at times fainted, rapid heartbeat/fast breathing, fall sick days before an examination, inability to settle down, frequently get nervous and forget facts already known and low morale and tendency to make more mistakes, experience panic attack, develop serious headache and sweat excessively or profusely. These factors were rated up to and above the instruments mean of 2.5 and were therefore considered highly practiced. Putwain, Woods and Symes (2010) [6] categorized examination anxiety as physical symptoms of test anxiety – like headache, tension, nausea, diarrhea, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, knot in the stomach, light headedness and feeling fainting all occur. Test anxiety can lead to panic attack, which is the abrupt unset of intense fear or discomfort in which individual may feel like they were unable to breath or having a heart attack. Again table 4 showed that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and student physical behaviour in taking examination.

Ways anxiety influence students' emotional behaviour in taking examination

The findings on table 5 revealed that students feel anxious when prepared for examination, have tendency to depend on other students and cheat in examinations, experience restlessness, always have feeling of anger, and experience nervousness. Others included students feeling panicky, always have fear of failure and usually get depressed. These emotional influences were rated up to and above the instruments mean of 2.5 and were therefore considered highly practiced. All these are as a result of anxiety. This is in line with Woods and Symes (2010) [6] who categorized examination anxiety as emotional/behavioural symptoms of test anxiety which included feelings of anger, fear, panic, restlessness, nervous, continual doubt, helplessness and disappointment are common emotional responses to examination or test anxiety. Table 6 revealed that there is significant relationship between students' anxiety and students' emotional behaviour in taking examination.

Conclusion

Information on influence of anxiety on undergraduate students' examination taking behaviours showed that students are highly influenced in conduct, physical and emotional as a result of anxiety especially their actions/behaviour in taking examination. The study concluded that there is significant relationship between influence of anxiety and students' misconduct, physical and emotional behaviour while taking examination in the universities of the South-East Geopolitical zone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study therefore, it was recommended as follows:

- Students should be helped to develop good study habits, and study at least a week or two weeks before the examination in small increment of time and over a few days.
- Students should be helped to establish a consistent pre-test routine, learn what works for each student, and follow the same steps each time students are getting ready to take a test. This will ease students stress level and assures that they are well prepared.

- Students should be helped to develop good test-taking skills, read instructions carefully, answer questions they know first and then return to the more difficult ones. Outline essays before one begins to write.
- Students should be encouraged to practice relaxation techniques, if one feels stressed during the examination, one is advised to take a deep, slow breath and consciously relax muscles, one at a time. This can invigorate one's body and will allow one a better focus on the examination.
- Students should be encouraged to stay healthy, just like muscles in one's body, brain needs fuel to function. Eat on the day of the test to avoid running on empty stomach when test time arrives. Also drink plenty of water. Avoid sugary drinks such as soda pop, which can cause blood sugar to rise to the peak and then drops, and the caffeinated beverages such as energy drinks or coffee, which can increase anxiety. Get enough sleep, exercise and allow for personal time. If one is exhausted – physically or emotionally – it will be more difficult for one to handle stress and anxiety.
- Students should be encouraged to visit counselling centres, talk therapy (psychotherapy) with a psychologist or other mental health providers that can help one work through feelings, thoughts and behaviours that cause or worsen anxiety.

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