

Impact of Test Anxiety and Mental Health Challenges on Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Student in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria

SAKA, Abdulganiyu^{1*}, MUSTAPHA Umar², ABDULSALAM Abdullahi³

¹Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

²Department of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education Borno State University, Nigeria.

³Department of Physical and Health Education, University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *This study investigates the correlation between test anxiety and mental health difficulties on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. Although mental health in academic settings is increasingly acknowledged as significant, there is a lack of research on how test anxiety and mental health challenges affect the academic performance of senior secondary school students. This study seeks to address this deficiency by examining the degree to which test anxiety and mental health difficulties impact the academic achievement of senior secondary school students. The study was guided by research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. The study utilised a descriptive survey research design. A total of 357 students were recruited from a population of 6,968 students utilising a non-probability purposive sampling technique, as indicated by the research advisory table. The study collected data using the Psycho-social predictors' questionnaire (PSPQ) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was reported for the device. The research topics and hypotheses were examined through the application of linear regression analysis. The study demonstrated a substantial correlation between exam anxiety and mental health among secondary school students in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Therefore, the null hypotheses were disproven. The study region provided recommendations for eliminating mental health challenges among secondary school students based on the findings.*

Keywords: Test Anxiety, Mental Health Challenges, Academic Performance, Senior Secondary school students, Descriptive methods approach.

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Introduction

The academic performance of senior secondary school students is a critical element of their educational trajectory, since it directly influences their future possibilities and opportunities. Nevertheless, numerous students encounter substantial obstacles in attaining their academic objectives, primarily as a result of the influence of exam anxiety and mental health difficulties. Test anxiety, a prevalent occurrence among students, can result in diminished performance, heightened stress, and reduced motivation (Spielberger, 1980). Likewise, academic performance can be greatly hindered by mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety disorders, and ADHD (Kessler et al., 2005). This introduction will present a comprehensive analysis of how test anxiety and mental health issues affect the academic performance of senior secondary school students. The influence of exam anxiety and mental health difficulties on academic performance is intricate and diverse. Test anxiety can impair performance as it causes students to experience distraction and anxiety when taking tests (Hembree, 1990). Depression and anxiety disorders can hinder students' motivation and concentration, resulting in lower performance (Hinshaw et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the correlation between test anxiety and mental health difficulties and their influence on academic achievement

might be comprehended by employing diverse theoretical frameworks. A framework that is relevant in this context is the idea of self-efficacy. This theory proposes that students' perceptions regarding their capability to perform well on examinations might have a substantial influence on their actual performance (Bandura, 1997). The idea of stress and coping, proposed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, posits that students' capacity to manage stress and anxiety can have an effect on their general well-being and academic achievement. The correlation between test anxiety, mental well-being, and academic achievement has been extensively studied in the field of educational psychology. The initial research conducted by Sarason in 1984 established the foundation for comprehending how anxiety can impede cognitive processes that are crucial for achieving academic success. Further studies have built upon this initial groundwork, investigating the complex nature of test anxiety and its influence on academic achievement.

Various psychological elements have a substantial impact on the academic performance of senior secondary school students. Test anxiety and mental health challenges are particularly important issues in educational settings globally (Pascoe et al., 2020). The prevalence of test anxiety and broader mental health issues among students has become increasingly apparent as they face high-stakes examinations and increased academic pressures. This has prompted researchers and educators to investigate how these issues impact

*Corresponding Author

SAKA, Abdulganiyu*

Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

scholastic achievement (von der Embse et al., 2018). Recent research has emphasised the intricate relationship between test anxiety, mental well-being, and academic achievement. A study conducted by von der Embse et al. (2018) discovered a noteworthy inverse relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement in different disciplines and grade levels, as revealed by a meta-analysis. In a study conducted by Weeks et al. (2016), it was found that mental health problems throughout early adolescence were a predictor of decreased academic achievement in subsequent years. Gaining insight into the influence of test anxiety and mental health issues on academic achievement is essential for creating efficient treatments and support structures in educational environments. To achieve a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that fosters academic performance and student well-being, educators and policymakers should tackle these concerns.

Test anxiety and mental health issues have become more common among senior secondary school students, greatly affecting their academic performance and overall well-being (Putwain & Daly, 2014). As academic expectations increase, students may face elevated levels of stress and anxiety, especially when it comes to important exams (von der Embse et al., 2018). This phenomenon, in conjunction with more extensive mental health concerns, can have extensive repercussions on students' cognitive abilities, drive, and eventually, their academic accomplishments. Test anxiety is a widespread occurrence that impacts numerous students around. It is defined by experiencing anticipation, fear, and worry regarding one's performance on tests (Spielberger, 1980). Test anxiety can have substantial repercussions on students' academic achievement, such as reduced performance, heightened stress, and diminished motivation (Hembree, 1990). Furthermore, exam anxiety can adversely impact students' mental well-being, leading to heightened manifestations of anxiety and depression (Kashdan & Ciarrochi, 2013). Test anxiety is a psychological condition that is defined as the extreme concern, dread, and anguish experienced before, during, or after tests (Zeidner, 2014). Research conducted by Lowe et al. (2008) suggests that a considerable proportion of students, ranging from 10% to 40%, suffer notable levels of test anxiety. Moreover, this phenomenon appears to be more prevalent among senior secondary school students. Test anxiety can be characterised by physiological symptoms such as elevated heart rate and perspiration, as well as cognitive symptoms including impaired concentration and negative self-dialogue (Cassady & Johnson, 2002).

Simultaneously, there has been an increase in overall mental health issues among teenagers in recent years. Twenge et al. (2019) conducted a study that found a notable rise in symptoms of depression and anxiety among teenagers from 2005 to 2017. These psychological conditions might worsen test anxiety and further hinder academic performance. Test anxiety can significantly affect the academic performance of secondary school students in the following manner:

Cognitive Interference: Test anxiety can interfere with cognitive processes essential for academic success, such as working memory, attention, and information processing (Moran, 2016). This interference can lead to underperformance, particularly in complex tasks that require higher-order thinking skills.

Motivation and Self-efficacy: Chronic anxiety and mental health issues can erode students' confidence in their abilities and reduce their motivation to engage in academic tasks (Putwain et al., 2010).

This can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where reduced effort leads to poorer performance, further reinforcing anxiety and negative self-perceptions.

Avoidance Behaviours: Students experiencing severe test anxiety or mental health challenges may engage in avoidance behaviours, such as procrastination or absenteeism, which can negatively impact their academic progress (Kearney, 2008).

Physical Health: The stress associated with test anxiety and mental health issues can manifest in physical symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, which can indirectly affect academic performance (Wren & Benson, 2004).

Long-term Educational Trajectories: Persistent test anxiety and mental health challenges can influence students' educational choices, potentially limiting their academic and career aspirations (Segool et al., 2013).

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the Impact of Test Anxiety and Mental Health Challenges on Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Student in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Research Question

Based on the above stated objectives, the following research questions were answered;

1. What is the influence of test anxiety and mental health challenges on academic performance of Secondary School students in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba state, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses are formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho: There is no significant influences of test anxiety and mental health challenges on academic performance of Secondary School students in wukari local government area of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Research Design

This study utilised a descriptive survey research approach. This design is appropriate for gathering data on individuals' opinions and perspectives regarding factors that may contribute to mental health difficulties. The process involves carefully gathering and analysing data from a certain population in order to describe particular characteristics of that community, as described by Creswell (2012). This design also allows for the generalisation of study findings to the target population, even if just a representative or sample of that population was actually studied. The study population consisted of all the SSII students in public schools in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, totalling 6,968 students across 21 schools. The male population consisted of 3,610 students, while the female population consisted of 3,358 students. The average age of both males and females was 21 years, and they were categorised as early adolescents and late adolescents. A non-probability sampling technique was used. Given that the study focusses on the behaviour of specific students, a non-probability sampling technique was employed to acquire a sample that accurately represents the study population. A purposive sampling technique was employed to pick 357 students

from the population, using the research advisor's (2006) table to determine the appropriate sample size. The research utilized two instruments: the Psycho-Social Predictors Questionnaire (PSPQ) and two iterations of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to gather data.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using Simple Linear Regression analysis to address the research objectives and hypotheses. The null hypotheses were evaluated at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$. The null hypotheses were accepted when the computed value was equal

to or greater than the alpha value ($p \geq 0.05$) and were rejected when the calculated value was less than the alpha value ($p < 0.05$). According to McQueen and Knussen (2006), simple linear regression is the most suitable statistical method for determining the relative influence of independent factors on a dependent variable, based on the nature of the hypotheses.

Influence of academic self-efficacy and mental health on academic performance of secondary school students in Wukari Local Government of Taraba State.

Table: Table of Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	53.951	1.281		42.118	.000
	Test Anxiety	.944	.055	.670	17.014	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Multiple R= .67^a

Multiple R² = .44

R² Adjusted= .44

F- VALUE = 289.46

The provided table of coefficients aims to elucidate the extent to which the predictor variable contributes to the model's distinctive variance. According to the table, the p-value of the predictor variable is lower than the alpha value of 0.05. This indicates that the t-values are statistically significant. Hence, the level of distinct variance accounted for by Test Anxiety in forecasting Students' Attendance is statistically significant. The unstandardised coefficient of B = .944 indicates that for every one unit rise in Test Anxiety, the model predicts that Students' Attendance will increase by .944 units, while keeping all other variables constant. Similarly, a standardised coefficient of Beta = .670 indicates that a one standard deviation rise in Test Anxiety is predicted to result in a .670 standard deviation unit increase in Students' Academic performance, while keeping all other predictors constant. The model exhibits statistical significance.

Discussion

This finding aligns with the research conducted by Melvina Amalu (2017), Deb, Strodi, and Sun (2015), who proposed that test anxiety has a major impact on mental health. The cognitive component of test anxiety, namely the worry factor, has repeatedly found to be connected with mental health issues and a drop in performance. This is because it involves negative thoughts, self-criticism, and concern about the negative repercussions of failure that occur during a test circumstance. This study demonstrates a significant correlation between exam anxiety and mental health difficulties among secondary school students. These vulnerable students require the guidance of a professional who can provide them with the necessary support and strategies to manage and adapt to their academic responsibilities and navigate the impact of anxiety on their mental well-being.

The ramifications of exam anxiety and mental health difficulties go beyond just the immediate impact on academic performance. According to Segool et al. (2013), continuous anxiety might have an impact on students' decisions on education and job goals, potentially restricting their future academic and professional paths.

Moreover, the reciprocal relationship between anxiety and underperformance can establish a self-perpetuating cycle that influences students' belief in their own abilities and drive to succeed (Putwain et al., 2010), which aligns with the results of this study. Researchers and educators have created many interventions and support measures to address the considerable influence of test anxiety and mental health issues on academic achievement. These encompass a variety of methods, including cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness-based therapies, and study skills training (Ergene, 2003). The efficacy of these interventions highlights the significance of incorporating psychological well-being as a fundamental element of academic support in secondary schools.

To summarise, the influence of test anxiety and mental health difficulties on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students is an intricate and diverse matter. It includes cognitive, physiological, and behavioral aspects that might greatly hinder students' capacity to showcase their genuine academic capabilities. Given the increasing prevalence of these challenges, it is imperative for educational institutions to provide comprehensive support systems that cater to the academic and psychological requirements of students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study have yielded significant evidence indicating that both test anxiety and mental health difficulties exert a profound influence on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students. The results indicated that test anxiety exerts a substantial detrimental effect on the academic achievement of students in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, namely in disciplines such as mathematics and English. Senior secondary school students commonly face mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and stress, resulting in the manifestation of symptoms associated with these diseases. The study also uncovered that students who have high levels of test

anxiety had a higher incidence of mental health challenges, indicating that test anxiety may play a role in the development of mental health issues. The influence of test anxiety and mental health difficulties on academic achievement extends beyond individual students and also impacts the overall academic performance of secondary schools in the study region. Consequently, studies advise that teachers and educational administrators should devise tactics to alleviate test anxiety in students, such as offering regular practice exams and lessening homework assignments.

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