

Strategies for coping with exam anxiety in university students

استراتيجيات التعامل مع حصر الامتحان عند الطالب الجامعي

Kerkouche Fatiha^{1,*}

¹University of Blida2. (Algeria), f.kerkouche@univ-blida2.dz

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Abstract:

Test anxiety is among the key factors that hinder academic achievement among university students. Many of them fail in their studies due to their inability to cope with examination situations, which often involve anxiety and tension that affect their adjustment to the testing context. However, students' ways of confronting such situations vary according to numerous factors, which in turn influence their chances of success and may lead to failure. The discussion is structured around the following points: The nature of test anxiety. The nature of coping strategies. Strategies for coping with test anxiety. Keywords: test anxiety, coping strategies, student

1. Introduction

The university is regarded as a fundamental driver of nations' advancement and prosperity, as it provides societies with outputs that actively contribute to their development. In this sense, the university student is considered a form of human capital essential for every developmental process within these societies. Nevertheless, prior to graduation, students often encounter a variety of academic and learning challenges of varying degrees of complexity. While some of these difficulties may be successfully managed, others may pose significant obstacles that hinder students' academic progress.

Within this framework, test anxiety stands out as one of the most pressing issues, as it drains students' energy and exerts detrimental effects not only on the psychological and academic dimensions, but-at times-also on the familial sphere. Parents often strive to understand their child's condition and provide support. Importantly, such a problem does not only capture the attention of families, but also necessitates targeted attention from all stakeholders in the education sector at large. This is precisely what renders the issue of particular relevance and importance.

Furthermore, drawing on our field experience in teaching and on numerous observations of students' responses during examination periods, we find ourselves compelled to offer a research contribution-albeit modest-in this domain. This is especially critical given that many university students

*Corresponding author

possess the requisite abilities to succeed and excel, provided they are granted the appropriate opportunities at the right time, enabling them to cope effectively with the pressures and discouraging emotions they often face.

From this perspective, our objective is to examine the phenomenon of test anxiety and to support university students by providing them with a set of strategies that may be adopted to mitigate and eventually overcome its intensity.

2. Statement of the Problem

Test anxiety is considered one of the most complex psychological challenges faced not only by learners themselves but also by their families as a whole. The psychological pressures experienced by students-regardless of their academic level or field of specialization-whether arising from family expectations (such as the strong desire of parents for their children's academic success) or from school-related factors (such as curriculum design, evaluation methods, and classroom interactions), contribute significantly to the development of test anxiety. In severe cases, the examination setting may be perceived as a distressing and fear-inducing experience.

It is important to note that throughout their educational journey, from the earliest stages to higher education, all students undergo a large number of tests and evaluations. While the majority face these situations with a manageable degree of anxiety and stress, some students experience acute levels of test anxiety that directly impair their performance and, consequently, their academic progress.

This can largely be attributed to the central role examinations play in students' lives, as they represent one of the principal mechanisms of assessment in both teaching and learning. Yet, the high stakes often associated with examinations may transform them into a source of fear and distress. As Zahran (2000) emphasized, test anxiety assumes particular importance due to its strong connection with the determination of a student's academic and professional future, as well as his or her social standing (p.95). For this reason, test anxiety constitutes a significant concern not only for students and their families but also for society at large, thereby motivating numerous specialists in the field to devote attention to its study.

Test anxiety is generally defined as a form of generalized anxiety accompanied by an emotional state characterized by tension and fear, which affects learners across various stages of their education. This state is directly linked to examinations and assessment processes, during which students exhibit numerous signs of disturbance, stress, and anxiety. The danger of this type of anxiety, as noted by Abu 'Azab (2008), arises when it escalates to advanced levels- shifting from a positive, motivating force that drives effort, achievement, and success, into an abnormal and maladaptive condition. At this stage, its symptoms become significant barriers to students' stability and success, both prior to and during assessment situations.

In this regard, Zaghloul (2012) indicated that the results of numerous studies have confirmed the negative impact of test anxiety on students' academic achievement, showing a consistent negative correlation between test anxiety and academic performance.

Psychologists, since the 1950s, have recognized the close relationship between anxiety and learning. Abu Azab (2008) reported that several studies revealed how some students perform below their actual abilities during assessment tasks due to exposure to situations or conditions characterized by stress and psychological pressure, such as the testing process itself. Students frequently display symptoms of agitation, tension, and apprehension in such contexts-symptoms commonly referred to as test anxiety- (p.72).

Similarly, Kisker (1988) emphasized that every developmental stage is marked by unique characteristics and stress-inducing situations. University students, in particular, face numerous stressors and crises, including examinations, relationships with peers and faculty members, competition for success, emotional difficulties, and the challenges of adapting to the demands, rules, and restrictions of the university environment, which often impose limitations on their autonomy and freedom.

3. Nature of Exam Anxiety

Abdel Khalek (1987) pointed out that exam anxiety is a type of general anxiety, and that some students, due to their psychological makeup, are more sensitive to exam anxiety than others. This means that the difference in anxiety between one student and another is a difference in degree, not in type.

Davidov (1976) defined exam anxiety as "the feeling associated with the approach of the exam date, which causes the student to have thoughts of failure, leading to terror and fear of failing, even if the student is prepared. Their self-confidence is shaken, and they are unable to perform well" (p. 49).

Abu Azab (2008) defined exam anxiety as "a state of fear that affects the student, associated with pre-exam situations that cause distress and discomfort, or the exam itself; where the student fears failure." Thus, exam anxiety is a type of fear that disrupts the student, hindering their performance and scattering their focus (p. 73). This is what Boudiaf and Ben Amara (2014) highlighted, stating that exam anxiety is a psychological condition characterized by disturbance that affects the learner during or before the exam (p. 95). It is considered a form of pathological fear that has a profound impact on the student's behavior and psyche, and this type of anxiety is linked to test situations. If the anxiety is intense, it affects the student's performance .

Spielberger framed this concept by stating that exam anxiety is "a state of tension or anxiety that individuals experience in the context of exams, manifested through feelings of fear, inability to focus, and

difficulty in organizing thoughts." In this context, the anxiety is not merely a temporary disturbance but can become a source of continuous pressure that leads to a decline in academic performance.

According to Al-Ayab (2018), exam anxiety intensifies in terms of its severity and intensity when it comes to official exams, such as the Baccalaureate, the middle school certificate, or transition exams (which involves a significant amount of evaluation) (p. 56). In these cases, the student lives through the situation in all its psychological, social, and academic dimensions, especially when it comes to maintaining balance and maximizing cognitive abilities. Therefore, exam anxiety is a type of anxiety that many students feel before or during the exam period. This anxiety can significantly affect an individual's performance and manifests in feelings of tension and fear of failure.

Based on the above, researchers have classified exam anxiety according to its impact on the learner's performance, and they have identified two types of exam anxiety, as mentioned by Boudiaf and Ben Amara (2014, p.103):

- **Facilitating Anxiety:** This is a moderate type of exam anxiety that has a positive, facilitating effect. It motivates the student (or anyone in a learning situation) to study, revise, and achieve better results. It is a type of anxiety that energizes the student and drives them to prepare for the exam.
- **Inhibiting Anxiety:** This is a high level of exam anxiety that has a negative, obstructive effect. It affects the student's nerves, increasing fear, distress, and dread, and triggers inappropriate responses to the situation. This results in a hindrance to the student's ability to recall information, understand the material, and disrupts their performance during the exam.

Researchers have also identified some primary types of exam anxiety in recent scientific studies, including:

- **Cognitive Anxiety:** This type of anxiety is defined as the anxiety that affects an individual's cognitive abilities during exams. It manifests as feelings of fear and anticipation, along with doubts about the ability to succeed. Cognitive anxiety leads to distraction and difficulty focusing, which results in poor performance (Akin, 2010).
- **Somatic Anxiety:** This type of anxiety manifests through physical symptoms, such as an increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, and nausea. These physical symptoms can directly affect the student's ability to perform during the exam and lead to a decline in concentration (Von der Embse et al., 2018).
- **Emotional Anxiety:** This type of anxiety is expressed through feelings of excessive tension and anxiety. It shows up as negative emotions, such as fear of failure, and can exacerbate the negative mental state that impacts performance.
- **Existential Anxiety:** This type of anxiety is closely related to concerns about the meaning of one's existence. The student may question the purpose of education and how these exams will affect their future. This anxiety may be driven by existential thoughts related to personal identity and the future.

- **Social Anxiety:** This type of anxiety arises in group exam settings or situations where students are subject to judgment from others. It is embodied in feelings of anxiety about social evaluation or comparisons with others in the academic context (Macher et al., 2012).

- **Functional Anxiety:** While most types of anxiety lead to decreased academic performance, functional anxiety can sometimes be beneficial. This type of anxiety motivates the students and drives them to work harder to prepare for exams. It is considered beneficial when managed properly.

Zeidner (1998) emphasized that researchers distinguish between two types of anxiety: functional anxiety, which can motivate the student to work hard, and dysfunctional anxiety, which hinders performance due to its negative effects on thinking and concentration.

- **Trait Anxiety:** This refers to chronic or general exam anxiety that students experience consistently, either in the context of exams or in other life situations. It is considered an indicator of a persistent pattern of anxiety that extends beyond emergency situations. In this context, several symptoms that affect students before or during exams are highlighted. According to Al-Dhamin (2003, p.221), some of the most prominent symptoms include tension, insomnia, loss of appetite, obsessive thoughts, constant thinking about the exam, and preoccupation with the results. Additionally, students may experience an accelerated heart rate, dry throat and lips, rapid breathing, sweating, abdominal pain, nausea, and intense psychological distress.

Zahran (2000) added to these symptoms the fear and anxiety before the exam, mental disruptions such as attention, concentration, and thinking disorders, as well as confusion, stress, lack of stability, and self-confidence. Students may also experience difficulty recalling information during the exam, forgetting what they studied upon seeing the exam paper, and cognitive interference in the form of negative and inappropriate thoughts about the exam, with a reduced ability to process information effectively (p.100).

Abu Azab (2008) further elaborated on these points, explaining that exam anxiety and academic performance anxiety consist of fundamental components, which can be identified as follows:

- **Cognitive Component:** Known as continuous discomfort, where the student is persistently preoccupied with thoughts about the potential consequences of failure. This discomfort is followed by fear of losing their status and self-esteem, which forms the essence of anxiety (p.72).

- **Emotional Component:** The emotional responses of the individual, such as feelings of distress, discomfort, panic attacks, and tension before and during the exam, in addition to various physiological and emotional symptoms.

While exam anxiety has its components that contribute to its causes, mental health professionals and educational specialists have also researched its origins. According to Zahran (2000), exam anxiety can be attributed to several factors, including (p.99):

- Lack of knowledge about the subjects.

- Problems with learning, organizing, reviewing information before the exam, or retrieving it during the exam itself.
- A history of failure in previous exams.
- Insufficient preparation for the exam, leading to a lack of self-confidence.
- The difficulty of the exams and the feeling that one's future depends on them.
- Environmental pressures, especially from family, to achieve a level of success that does not match the student's abilities, as well as efforts to please parents, teachers, and compete with peers.

4. The Nature of Coping Strategies

Coping strategies have been a major focus for many researchers who have provided various theoretical frameworks aimed at defining them and revealing their effectiveness. The concept of coping has undergone several theoretical interpretations, all of which served as preliminary stages that led to the emergence of this concept and its formalization under the cognitive theory of stress and coping. This theory considers coping strategies as a set of cognitive contexts that determine how individuals respond to various stressful events. The concept of "coping" has gained multiple meanings and is often used synonymously with terms like control, defense, and adaptation. It is also referred to under many other terms such as coping methods, strategies for adjustment, and adapting to stress. It is important to note that discussing "coping" cannot be done without addressing the meaning of "stressful situations".

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as: "A set of behavioral and cognitive efforts in a state of continuous change, aimed at managing internal and/or external demands that exceed the individual's resources and capabilities; it is not merely a reaction to an emotion, but rather the context that is based on what the individual thinks and does when confronting a stressor" (p.53). On the other hand, Hussein and Hussein (2006) referred to Frydenbar and Lewis' definition, where coping is understood as "a set of emotional and cognitive actions that an individual performs in response to stressful situations, with the goal of restoring balance or eliminating the disturbance and tension they experience." This means either removing the stressor or adapting to it.

Based on this, coping strategies are identified as processes that require a set of skills and approaches used to deal with a stressor and/or difficult situations. This, in turn, depends on how the individual assesses critical situations to confront them. According to (Paulhan et al., 1994), individuals do not remain passive in the face of the situations and events they encounter, rather, they attempt to cope with them using various possible methods.

Stress arises from certain factors known as "stressors," which are various stimuli. Ritchie (1999) classified these stressors into three major categories:

- **Environmental Stressors:** These include both natural and artificial factors in the environment.

- **Internal Stressors:** These encompass variables such as age, perception, gender, etc.
- **Psychosocial Stressors:** These include personality traits and social support systems.

In the Context of the University Environment, Hussein and Al-Zayout (1999) pointed out that university students are not immune to the life circumstances and conflicts that many face. The university experience, in its academic, social, psychological, and behavioral aspects, represents a source of various kinds of stressors for students at this stage (p. 158). Regarding exam situations, Spielberger (1980) argued that students with high test anxiety tend to view the exam situation as a personal threat. In test situations, they are often tense, fearful, nervous, and emotionally agitated due to their previous experiences, which affect their attention and interfere with their focus during exams. University students often experience significant academic pressures within the educational environment. Boudiaf and Ben Amara (2014) added that the transition from one school to another, or from school to university, in itself represents a source of anxiety and pressure that must be managed effectively. Especially in the academic and study aspects, these transitions can hinder efficient learning. Ibrahim (2003) clarified that such pressure could lead to academic failure, lack of achievement, a dislike of studying, and resulting psychological frustrations and emotional disturbances (p.503).

Hussein and Hussein (2006) noted that some pressures reflect the academic struggles students face within the school environment, such as difficulty with academic subjects, lack of motivation, the overwhelming number of subjects, traditional teaching methods, exam systems, assignments, overcrowded classrooms, academic failure for some students, tense relationships between students and teachers, and the need to conduct research.

However, it is important to emphasize that not every academic situation is experienced as a stressor. Not every stressful situation is perceived as such, but it is about how we perceive the situation. In this regard, one of the important variables that determine how a person responds to stress is how they perceive the stressor. The response that the individual exhibits depends on how they interpret or evaluate the importance of the threat or danger they face. This is what Al-Rayhani (1982) pointed out when he said that the evaluation of this danger is not a simple perception of the elements of the situation but rather a judgment and reasoning process, where data is gathered to form thoughts and expectations. Any change in an element, such as the background of the situation in which the stimulus was perceived, can significantly alter the person's interpretation of the situation. This means that how we read or interpret such situations is what determines our responses. As Yakhlef (2001) stated, "According to Lazarus's stress and coping theory, we cannot understand psychological stress without referring to the cognitive component behind the individual's interpretation of the situation or event they are experiencing (p.51). The process of perceiving and evaluating the situation is the foundation of confronting and overcoming life stress." Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasized that "this evaluation is a complex process in which

the most appropriate coping methods are selected, which are expected to be effective in controlling a given situation".

This theory suggests that the way we perceive and interpret stressful situations plays a crucial role in how we cope with them, which can determine the effectiveness of the coping strategies we adopt. Based on what Spielberger (1980) defined regarding exam anxiety as "a temporary emotional state caused by perceiving evaluative situations as a threat to one's personality, accompanied by tension, emotional arousal, and negative mental preoccupations," the pressures faced by university students, whether in their family, university, or society, represent undeniable or unignorable influences. If the individual fails to confront and adapt to these pressures, it can lead to numerous psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression.

From this perspective, we can say that pressure is not considered pressure unless it is perceived as such. For instance, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined perceived stress as a special interaction between the person and the environment, where the individual evaluates the situation as either within their resources or exceeding them, potentially threatening their well-being. Hence, the self-assessment of these stressful situations is more important than the objective facts themselves. Therefore, perceived stress can be seen as a self-assessment rather than an objective evaluation of the stressful situation. Consequently, the exam situation can be perceived as a stressful situation that triggers the student's anxiety and evokes many fears and threats.

It is clear that the specificity of coping strategies and their effectiveness depend on the characteristics of the situation. There is no universally effective coping strategy that exists independently of the individual's cognitive and perceptual traits, nor the specifics of the stressful situations and their evaluations. The quality of coping strategies is determined by their ability to positively and effectively impact and change distressing situations, their long-term effectiveness, and their ability to bring about change. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) suggested that understanding coping strategies and evaluating their effectiveness largely depends on examining them in the context of the stressful situations that individuals experience.

Additionally, this evaluation cannot be separated from the individual's belief system. Denoff (1987) argued that this system plays an important role in coping strategies because beliefs-whether logical or illogical-intervene in the process of evaluating situations perceived as stressful. False beliefs, in particular, are linked to various emotional and behavioral disorders, such as anxiety and depression. In the academic context, a student can, depending on several factors, develop such beliefs that hinder their activity, reduce their motivation, and place them in a constant state of anxiety about failure, to the point of labeling themselves as ineffective.

What further complicates matters, in addition to these negative thoughts and emotions, is the student's sense of helplessness, where they believe they cannot overcome the pressure. This was clarified by (Folkman et al., 1986), who pointed out that stressful situations perceived as uncontrollable lead individuals to feelings of negativity and depression. In the case of university students, Condry and Sharon (1976) presented some common beliefs among students regarding exams and their results, which are unreasonable assumptions that negatively affect them, such as:

- "My future will be ruined if I fail and don't get the grades I want."
- "I am unlucky in exams."
- "My peers are always better at exams."
- "Exams are always too difficult."
- "I can't cover most of the curriculum, and therefore I will fail the exams."
- "Exams are unrealistic and lack the basic knowledge and understanding".

These illogical thoughts are a major source of anxiety for students, affecting their ability to handle exams effectively.

Denoff (1987) indicated that the process of control plays a crucial role in evaluating the situation, where individuals in situations they perceive as uncontrollable tend to feel helpless, unlike those who believe they can manage and control the same events. This means that individuals are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies in situations they perceive as controllable, while they tend to adopt emotion-focused coping strategies in situations they perceive as uncontrollable and that require acceptance.

To clarify this concept, Khattar (2001) presented the model defined by Seligman, which explains the stages a student or learner goes through when facing an exam, leading to anxiety. The stages are as follows (p.57):

- **Challenge Stage:** The learner is overwhelmed by failure but maintains confidence in their ability to face the situation.
- **First Threat Stage:** This stage occurs when the learner realizes the task at hand is very difficult, which causes stress and anxiety. However, they maintain self-confidence and continue their activity.
- **Second Threat Stage:** Due to the anxiety the learner feels, they start to doubt their ability to continue the task. They begin to question their skills and performance, focusing on failure and fear. This thinking tires them and leads to a sense of helplessness, along with some emotional and physiological disturbances.
- **Loss of Control Stage:** The learner feels unable to control the situation, causing them to stop putting in effort and abandon the required activity, ultimately leading to failure in the exam.

This model illustrates the process of negatively evaluating the situation. The learner perceives the exam as a difficult situation, which leads to a loss of self-confidence and doubts about their abilities. Anxiety and stress emerge, accompanied by physiological effects, which affect their thinking. They become preoccupied with failure. Such responses are inappropriate for exam situations and do not help the student adopt an effective coping strategy for dealing with the situation. At this point, it is important to discuss the classification made by (Folkman et al., 1986), which gained widespread recognition in the literature on coping strategies. It categorizes these strategies into:

- **Problem-Focused Coping Strategies:** This type of coping aims to manage stress through attempts to change the relationship at the individual-environment level. Terry (1994) argued that the goal of problem-focused coping is to manage the problem itself, such as the problem-solving strategy, which Dzurla and Goldfried & D’Zurilla (1997) considered a behavioral process that is either overtly expressed in an explicit or direct way, or cognitive in nature. This behavioral process has two characteristics: first, it provides a set of alternative responses that are highly effective in allowing the individual to cope with the problematic situation; second, it increases the likelihood of selecting the most effective response among the multiple alternatives.

In addition to the problem-solving strategy, there is also the social support-seeking strategy, which in the university context is reflected in the results of the research by Griffin and Griffin (1997) regarding the impact of peer advice and idea exchange on reducing exam anxiety. The study, conducted on a sample of 131 university students, confirmed that peer advice exchange helps increase academic achievement and reduce exam anxiety.

Badr (1993) also clarified that seeking help and consultation is very beneficial when a student experiences feelings of anxiety, pressure, and difficulty adapting to their studies. This may involve seeking assistance or advice from friends, parents, social workers, psychological counselors, or doctors. These individuals can provide support to help the student cope with anxiety and attempt to reduce the tension and disruption affecting their ability to continue studying or take exams (p. 10).

- **Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies:** According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), emotion-focused coping refers to any effort aimed at modifying the emotional responses associated with stressful events. Among these strategies, we find the avoidance strategy, which involves escaping from the problem, either by sleeping, engaging in excessive eating and drinking, or using drugs or medications. On the other hand, (Graziani et al., 1998) explained that escaping a stressful situation may take a different form, such as imagining oneself in a better place than the one they are in. Additionally, the self-blame strategy is another emotion-focused coping mechanism, in which the individual blames themselves and accuses themselves of being the cause of the problem.

Hussein and Hussein (2006) pointed out that Cotton categorized stress coping strategies into the following types (p. 96):

- **Physiological Strategies:** These focus on emotion and aim to deal with the physiological changes caused by stress. They include several techniques to cope with stress, such as relaxation training. These strategies are often used when suffering from a chronic illness, as they center around modifying the individual's lifestyle.
- **Cognitive Strategies:** These are used in the process of coping with the individual's perception of stressful situations. This category includes techniques like stopping irrational or illogical thinking (which is particularly useful for students who have a strong fear of exams). These strategies aim to change and reduce the emotional and cognitive responses to stress- specifically, replacing negative and irrational thoughts with positive and logical ones.
- **Behavioral Strategies:** These aim to modify the nature of the stressful situation and include several techniques, such as assertiveness and time management.

In addition to the strategies focused on emotion, there are those that focus on managing stress responses, which include new behavioral patterns like using distractions to alleviate stress responses.

Based on our experience in the university environment, we have encountered numerous cases of students resorting to indirect methods during exams, such as cheating, creating chaos, or stirring trouble in the exam room, or repeatedly wanting to leave for the restroom, or submitting blank exam papers without making any effort. All of these behaviors reflect responses aimed at avoiding the exam.

Therefore, Dantchev (1989) argued that emotion-focused strategies like avoidance and escape are used by "those unable to confront" in various ways. They use these strategies to conceal or distance themselves from the source of discomfort, or to divert attention from the source of stress. This way, the individual experiences temporary relief without effectively addressing the source of the stress. This aligns with the findings of Denoff (1991), whose study explored the relationship between irrational beliefs, event perception (attribution), and coping strategies. The study concluded that problem-solving linked to avoidance tends to lean heavily towards negativity, where beliefs and perceptions influence the choice of coping strategies, such as escaping.

5. Coping Strategies for Exam Anxiety:

Based on the previous information regarding exam anxiety, we conclude that this type of anxiety is necessary for success and excellence as long as its level remains within normal limits. In some cases, test anxiety can lead to a state of alertness and motivation to take appropriate actions, such as proper preparation and effective study for exams to avoid failure. However, when the level of anxiety exceeds the normal threshold, it becomes an obstacle that hinders learners. Zaghloul (2012) clarified that this type of

anxiety negatively impacts their academic cognitive performance and also paralyzes their willpower, affecting their attention and concentration during information processing (p. 396). This often leads some learners to escape from the situation, skip the exam, or come up with excuses like illness. These negative coping mechanisms become a defense mechanism against the perceived threat.

Therefore, behaviorists believe that individuals use adaptive strategies, both positive and negative, when interacting with their surrounding environments and the pressures and problems imposed upon them. As Asfour (1994) considered, exam anxiety is a negative strategy characterized by psychological and physical withdrawal from the stressful situation, manifesting in various behavioral patterns such as sweating, increased adrenaline secretion, crying, inability to hold a pen, and muscle spasms (p.54).

In contrast to these negative strategies, there are many strategies that a student can follow to alleviate the anxiety they feel regarding exams. However, it is important to note that the way students deal with exam anxiety differs from one individual to another, depending on their personal characteristics, the nature of the exam, and the level of anxiety they feel before and during the exams.

Several strategies have been scientifically developed to address exam anxiety. Below are some of the most effective strategies, which have been supported by recent research in the fields of psychology and education:

A. Time Management and Preparation: Proper preparation and time management are among the most important strategies to reduce exam anxiety. When students set a suitable study schedule and divide their study time effectively, it helps build their confidence and reduces the stress associated with deadlines. Results from studies indicated that students who follow structured and time-limited study plans experience lower levels of exam anxiety, and that effective time management during exam periods helps reduce anxiety.

B. Relaxation Techniques: Relaxation techniques include deep breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga, all aimed at reducing both physical and mental tension. Using these techniques before and during exams helps lower the physiological response to anxiety, such as rapid heartbeat and sweating. Research by Benson (2011) showed that using techniques such as deep meditation and regular breathing exercises can significantly reduce anxiety levels in students before exams. Additionally, students who practiced relaxation techniques like deep breathing reported significant improvements in their ability to manage exam anxiety.

C. Cognitive Reappraisal: This strategy involves modifying negative thinking and turning it into positive thinking. For example, instead of thinking "I will fail this exam," the student can think, "I have studied well and I can handle this challenge." This shift in thinking helps reduce anxiety and improves performance. This is supported by research conducted by Gross (2020), who found that modifying negative thoughts to

positive ones is strongly linked to reduced anxiety in stressful situations (such as exams). Similarly, a study by (Aldao et al., 2021) confirmed that students who used cognitive reappraisal strategies experienced lower anxiety levels and improved exam performance.

D. Mental Preparation and Self-monitoring: Mental preparation involves visualizing success in exams by imagining a clear image of achievement or practicing mental exercises before the exams. Self-monitoring, on the other hand, includes checking progress in preparation and identifying areas that need further work. In a study by Beilock and Carr (2021) also, Zimmerman (2021) on "Mental Preparation and Anxiety," it was confirmed that students who invest time in mental exercises, such as visualizing success in exams, perform better and experience less anxiety. Moreover, self-monitoring and regular assessment of study progress help reduce anxiety and contribute to achieving better academic outcomes.

E. Social Support: Having a strong social support network, such as friends, family, or teachers, can significantly reduce anxiety levels and help students cope with pressure. Psychological and emotional support from others enhances self-confidence and contributes to better mental health in learners. Studies by Baker & Berenbaum (2022) have shown that social support from family and friends plays a crucial role in reducing exam anxiety. This support allows students to feel understood and emotionally supported, and those with a strong social support network experience lower levels of anxiety during exams.

F. Self-motivation and Positive Thinking: Self-motivation, through setting short-term and long-term goals and celebrating small achievements, can boost self-confidence and reduce stress. Additionally, positive thinking about success and believing that failure is not the end of the world can help students better manage exam anxiety. This was supported by Dweck (2021) in his research on self-motivation and positive thinking, where he concluded that students who focus on improving their skills rather than fearing failure experience lower levels of anxiety.

In this context, Chang (1985) proposed a list of self-guidance strategies aimed at helping learners reduce the pressures associated with thinking and anxiety, which often lead to feelings of frustration. This list generally revolves around the following themes:

- Don't dwell on the past: Focus on the "here and now."
- Think about the future in the long term.
- Focus on working effectively on academic tasks.
- Avoid negative self-talk about exams and the anxiety that comes with them.
- Utilize previous experiences.

This means that students can invest in themselves in a positive way, transforming their negative perception of the exam situation into a more rational one. By taking their time during the exam and

focusing solely on their paper, without getting distracted by external factors, students can improve their approach. Although the nature of exams often induces fear of failure, even among top students, early review and proper preparation for these exams from the beginning of the academic year can provide a sense of reassurance and psychological comfort. It also builds self-confidence and helps students appreciate the efforts they are putting in to achieve their goals. This, in turn, has a positive impact on their academic performance and success. As Zahran (2000) noted, self-confident students tend to demonstrate emotional balance, accept criticism and evaluation from others, and maintain a realistic view of themselves, neither exaggerating nor underestimating their abilities and characteristics.

In addition, Abu Azab (2008) proposed several methods that students can follow to reduce or even eliminate their exam anxiety and fear. He summarized these strategies as follows:

- Trust in God and seek His help for success and facilitation.
- Try to organize study time, create a study schedule, and divide subjects to study regularly.
- Maintain a healthy and balanced diet to facilitate studying and absorption.
- Choose diligent peers who do not waste their time on distractions.
- Study subjects in advance before the exam so that there is enough time.
- Avoid being affected by discussions among students about the difficulty of subjects and exam questions.
- Sleep early and ensure adequate rest, as this helps alleviate stress and anxiety.

In this context, (Austin et al., 1995) proposed methods for preventing academic failure through addressing test anxiety. They recommended training students in stress management strategies, based on Wolpe's approach to systematic desensitization and learning muscle relaxation techniques to reduce test anxiety. Similarly, Al-Rayhani (1982) agreed with previous scholars about the importance of relaxation techniques, including deep breathing exercises and muscle relaxation, to reduce stress and help students feel revitalized. Al-Rayhani noted that many previous studies had used systematic desensitization as an intervention. He also referred to a study by Aponte and Aponte (1971), which used systematic desensitization in combination with muscle relaxation in three groups of students: the experimental group (which received both techniques), the second group (which received only muscle relaxation), and a control group (which received no intervention). The results showed that the combination of systematic desensitization and muscle relaxation was more effective in reducing test anxiety than muscle relaxation alone.

Moreover, Badr (1993) suggested using the guided imagery technique, which helps alleviate anxiety by encouraging students to envision success and relaxation. This technique focuses on the individual as a unique being with growing needs and responsibilities, as well as a natural inclination toward growth and self-improvement. Guided imagery enables students to approach their world from a new, positive perspective and can significantly reduce anxiety during exams. These strategies, taken

together, highlight the importance of psychological preparation, effective time management, relaxation techniques, and mental visualization in helping students manage test anxiety and improve their performance.

In this context, the importance of therapeutic programs to reduce the severity of exam anxiety and help students overcome this challenging phase that could potentially change the course of an individual's life becomes evident. This highlights that it is a psychological disorder that needs attention and research to help those students whose lives have been disrupted by this type of anxiety.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that exam anxiety represents a psychological phenomenon linking the individual to their educational environment, with significant effects on academic performance and the mental health of students. Exam anxiety is characterized as an emotional and physical response triggered by the psychological pressure students experience before and during exam periods.

Scientific studies have shown that exam anxiety in itself is not inherently negative, it can be a positive motivator for students to achieve success and excellence when managed properly. When exam anxiety remains within normal limits, it helps increase motivation and focus, enhancing academic performance. However, excessive anxiety negatively impacts the student's ability to concentrate and engage with exam questions effectively, leading to lower academic achievement. Thus, adopting effective strategies to manage exam anxiety and reduce its negative effects is essential.

The relationship between academic anxiety and exam performance calls for consideration of how to mentally and emotionally prepare students from an early stage in their education. While exams are part of the assessment process, they should not be a source of overwhelming stress that leads to psychological disorders that can persist for long periods. Therefore, it is essential to integrate psychological and educational awareness into curricula, as well as provide the necessary support for students to help them manage their anxiety more effectively. This approach will contribute to creating a healthier and more balanced educational environment.

By considering these factors comprehensively, it becomes clear that exam anxiety cannot be dismissed as a mere transient response. Instead, it is a psychological disorder that must be addressed in a scientific and systematic way to enable students to overcome this challenging phase with minimal negative impact. As such, it is important for educational institutions to provide academic and psychological support to students and adopt educational strategies that consider the mental and physical well-being of students during their academic journey. This will enhance their ability to face the challenges of exams and achieve sustainable academic success.

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