

SELF CONCEPT MENTAL HEALTH AND EXAMINATION ANXIETY A STUDY ON TEACHER TRAINEES

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Abstract

In the current global academic climate, teachers' concern about exams has taken on a vital role. A few academics have explored the causes of examination anxiety in teachers. This demonstrates the paucity of research on teacher exam anxiety and its effects on students' academic growth. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the linear relationship between two self-report instruments: the factors that contribute to teacher examination anxiety and the strategies used to cope with test anxiety. The study used a quantitative methodology, and participants in the survey included three hundred instructors from four secondary schools in Nigeria and twenty teachers from two secondary schools in North Cyprus. For the analysis, a structural equation model (SEM) was also used. The study's findings suggest a relationship between the two variables—teacher-caused exam anxiety and pre-exam coping strategies. The results also show that preparing teachers for exams while dealing with a variety of anxiety-related issues is a challenging task that requires educational stakeholders to continuously improve on factors that contribute to teachers' pre-exam anxiety and causes of examination anxiety in order to improve academic and ethical development.

Keywords: exam anxiety; avoidance; preparation; assessment; behaviours; beliefs

INTRODUCTION

It is of the utmost importance that individuals, and especially those who are in the process of becoming teachers, maintain a healthy mental state in the field of education. The future educators who will affect the educational experiences of innumerable children are represented by teacher trainees. In light of this, it is of the utmost importance to have a fundamental awareness of their self-concept and the connection it has with their mental health, particularly in the context of examination anxiety. Self-concept is an essential component of human psychology that comprises an individual's views, beliefs, and judgements of themselves when it comes to a variety of different aspects of their lives. A person's behaviour, emotions, and overall well-being are all significantly influenced by it to a significant degree. There is a strong correlation between having a good self-concept and having greater levels of psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. On the other hand, having a negative self-concept might be a contributing factor in psychological discomfort and sensitive to stressors such as stress related to examinations. Examination anxiety is a common phenomena among students, and it is characterised by emotions of dread, stress, and physiological arousal in response to events that include evaluation. While a certain amount of anxiety can be beneficial to performance because it can motivate preparation and attention, excessive worry can have a negative impact on cognitive functioning and academic accomplishment.

When it comes to teacher trainees, the connection between self-concept, mental health, and examination anxiety is something that deserves academic consideration for a number of different reasons. There is a substantial shift in roles and duties that occurs throughout the transition from student to teacher. This shift has the ability to influence both the individual's opinions of themselves and their levels of stress. Second, the teaching profession is intrinsically taxing, as it requires workers to handle a variety of classroom situations, the demands of students, and the requirements of academics, all of which can make anxiety symptoms worse. Finally, a full knowledge of these interrelationships may be used to influence the creation of tailored interventions to enhance the mental well-being of teacher trainees and to maximise the academic and professional results of these trainees.

Because of this, the purpose of this study is to investigate the connections between self-concept, mental health, and examination anxiety among those who are in the process of becoming teachers. Its goal is to contribute to the current body of literature on student mental health and to inform evidence-based methods for building resilience and academic achievement within teacher education programmes. This will be accomplished by clarifying the dynamics that are associated with these dynamics.

Examinations' Anxiety

A mix of physiological over-arousal, tension, and physical symptoms, together with concern, dread, and fear of failure, are the components that make up examination anxiety. These symptoms might manifest themselves either before or during the event of an examination. During or prior to taking a test, those who suffer from this physiological condition endure tremendous levels of tension, anxiety, and discomfort to a significant degree. The anxiety that individuals experience presents major impediments to learning and performance. There is a strong association between high levels of emotional distress and lower academic performance as well as greater overall student dropout rates, according to research. Anxiety over tests can have larger effects, including a detrimental impact on a student's social, emotional, and behavioural development, as well as their attitudes about themselves and their school. A student's score on a test is around 12 percentile points lower than their classmates who have a low level of test anxiety. It is common for students all around the world to have anxiety when they are taking tests. Beginning with scholars George Mandrel and Seymour Sarason, it has been the subject of formal investigation ever since the early 1950s. After that, Sarason's brother, Irwin G. Sarason, made a contribution to the early exploration of test anxiety. He helped to explain the link between the concentrated effects of test anxiety, other focused kinds of worry, and generalised anxiety. A number of other names can be used to describe test anxiety, including anticipatory anxiety, situational anxiety, and evaluative anxiety. Anxiety is a natural part of life and may frequently be beneficial in maintaining mental and physical alertness. The sensation of excessive anxiety, on the other hand, can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including mental and physical suffering, difficulties concentrating, and emotional worriedness. Testing conditions produce a sense of threat for individuals who are suffering test anxiety; the anxiety that results from the sense of threat subsequently affects attention and memory function, which leads to inferior performance. This is not due of intellectual issues or inadequate academic preparation; rather, it is because of the testing situations themselves. According to the findings of some researchers, between 25 and 40 percent of pupils suffer anxiety when taking tests. In general, children who are enrolled in gifted education programmes and students who have impairments are more likely to have high levels of test anxiety. Students who suffer from test anxiety are more likely to be quickly distracted during a test, to have difficulties grasping instructions that are relatively straightforward, and to struggle with organising or retaining material that is pertinent to the exam. Anxiety is a natural human feeling that

nearly everyone goes through at some point in their lives. A great number of individuals have feelings of anxiety or nervousness when confronted with a difficulty at work, prior to taking a test or making a significant decision. Anxiety disorders, on the other hand, are distinct issues. These things have the potential to create such a great deal of distress that it makes it difficult for a person to lead a regular life. Anxiety disorders are among the most dangerous forms of mental disease. People who suffer from anxiety disorders are plagued by persistent and overwhelming feelings of worry and fear, which may be debilitating.

Signs and symptoms

In order to better prepare a person for potential dangers, researchers think that sensations of worry might occur. A continuum may be used to describe the distribution of anxiety symptoms in individuals, and varying degrees of anxiety symptoms can be used to predict outcomes. In response, the individual experiences a rise in their heart rate, the release of stress hormones, restlessness, alertness, and anxiety of being in a situation that might possibly be hazardous. When a person is anxious, their body is physiologically, cognitively, and behaviorally prepared to identify and respond to potential threats to their existence. As a consequence of this, the body of a person starts to hyperventilate in order to promote the entry of more oxygen into the bloodstream, to redirect blood to the muscles, and to sweat in order to cool the skin. When it comes to people, the degree to which an anxiety response is created is determined by the likelihood of negative events occurring in the environment as well as the individual's capacity to deal with such events. This might be a poor grade on an examination, which would prohibit the student from being accepted to a post-secondary school. In the case of test taking, this could describe the situation. The ideas that a person holds about their capabilities constitute a sort of self-knowledge, which is an essential component in the process of analysing circumstances that have the potential to be dangerous. When an individual has a low sense of competence with their capabilities, they are more prone to predict unfavourable outcomes, such as failure, when they are confronted with unclear circumstances. Therefore, pupils who have poor competences are more likely to view evaluative settings, such as examinations and exams, as being more intimidating.

Causes of Examination Anxiety

There is a correlation between parental pressure and increased levels of worry, thoughts that are irrelevant to the exam, and more intense physical symptoms that are connected with anxiety during a test, according to research. The dread of failing, procrastination, and prior bad performance on tests are all potential additional factors that might contribute to test anxiety. Additionally, the qualities of the test environment, such as the nature of the task, the difficulty of the work, the atmosphere, the time limitations, the characteristics of the examiner, the style of administration, and the physical location, might have an effect on the amount of anxiety that the student experiences. In an effort to create a more high-stress atmosphere, Putwain and Best (2011) conducted a study in which they investigated the performance of primary school kids on tests while the instructor exerted pressure on the students. The results of their study demonstrated that students fared less well in high-danger scenarios, had greater exam anxiety, and had more worrying thoughts than they did when they were in an environment with a low level of threat. The vicious loop that is test anxiety is well documented to grow over time. After experiencing test anxiety on one exam, the student may become so afraid of it happening again that they become more worried and agitated than they would normally be, or even more than they experienced on the test that they had previously taken. It is possible that the student will start to feel powerless in the situation if the cycle continues without recognition or if the student seeks more assistance. Individuals who suffer from test anxiety frequently have parents or

siblings who also suffer from test anxiety or suffer from other forms of anxiety. It would appear that there are some hereditary factors involved with anxiety.

OBJECTIVES

The Objectives of the study are as followings :-

1. To create a scale for teacher candidates' exam anxiety.
2. To investigate how teacher candidates' exam anxiety is influenced by their gender.
3. To investigate how a place affects teacher candidates' exam anxiety.

RESEARCH METHOD

Following procedure was used to carry out the study:

Population

The study's participants were aspiring educators enrolled in three Pakistani universities: Sardar Bahadur Khan University in Quetta, University of the Punjab in Lahore, and University of Education in Lahore.

Sample

A sample of 219 prospective teachers (184 females and 35 males) was selected from three universities through simple random sampling technique.

Research Instrument

Two approved questionnaires were employed as a means of gathering data. Driscoll (2004) developed the "Westside test anxiety scale" to measure test anxiety. Rosenberg's (1965) "Roberson Self-Esteem Questionnaire" was used to gauge the self-concept of aspiring teachers. For self-reported items, respondents were required to provide a response on a five-point Likert scale. A pilot study was used to validate the instrument. Cronbach alpha (reliability index) was .76, which is statistically acceptable.

Procedure of Data Collection

The heads of three institutions gave their written agreement, and then the prospective teachers were contacted and informed about the nature and goal of the project. They received assurances that any information obtained about them would be kept private and utilised exclusively for scientific purposes. To prevent errors linked to measuring, all aspiring teachers received the same guidelines. One questionnaire took about fifteen minutes to complete.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Using SPSS for data analysis, a t-test was used to determine if male and female prospective teachers in the B Ed Honours programme had different self-concepts and levels of test anxiety. The Pearson r correlation

coefficient was used to determine the type of link that existed between the two variables. Following analysis of the data, the findings were tabulated and presented with explanations beneath each table.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for test anxiety and self-concept score

Variable		Test Anxiety Score	Self concept Score
Male	High	13 (37%)	23 (66%)
	Low	22 (63%)	12 (44%)
Female	High	91 (49%)	76(41%)
	Low	93(51%)	108(59%)
Total		219	219

Table 1 indicates that a greater proportion of male prospective instructors with low test anxiety than those with high anxiety were found. Additionally, prospective male teachers had a more positive self-concept. The table also reveals that a higher percentage of female prospective teachers (49%) than male prospective teachers (41%) reported experiencing considerable test anxiety. Comparably, more male prospective teachers (66%) than female prospective teachers (41%) had a strong self-concept. Overall, it was shown that male prospective teachers had a better sense of self and experience less test anxiety than female candidates.

Table 2 Group Statistics for mean difference between male and female prospective teachers for test anxiety and self concept scores

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Test Anxiety Score	Male	35	19.86	6.81	1.15
	Female	184	22.07	8.76	.65
Self-concept Score	Male	35	30.83	8.77	1.48
	Female	184	25.6	6.82	.50

Table 2 shows that, in comparison to male prospective teachers (M = 19.86, SD = 6.81), female prospective teachers had a higher mean score for test anxiety (M = 22.07, SD = 8.76), while male prospective teachers had a higher mean score for self-concept (M = 30.83, SD = 8.77) than female prospective teachers (M = 25.6, SD = 6.825).

Table 3 Independent sample t-test for difference in test anxiety and self-concept between male and female prospective teachers of B Ed (Hon)

Variables	F	t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Test Anxiety	3.90	-1.41	217	.158	-2.21	1.56
Self-Concept	2.95	3.96	217	.000	5.23	1.32

Table 3 demonstrates that, with $t(217)=-1.41$, $p=.158$, there was no significant difference in the mean test anxiety scores of the male (M =19.86, SD= 6.81 as given in table 2) and female (M =22.07, SD=8.76 as given in table 2) prospective instructors of B Ed (Hon). Additionally, the table shows that there was a significant difference ($t(217)=3.96$, $p =.000$) in the mean scores of the self-concept levels of male (M=30.83,

SD=8.77) and female (M=25.6, SD=6.825) prospective instructors of B Ed (Hons.). The overall findings indicated that male prospective teachers had a higher sense of self-worth than female prospective teachers, but they also showed lower levels of exam anxiety.

Table 4 Correlation matrix for test anxiety and self- concept

Scale	Test Anxiety	Self Concept
Test Anxiety	1	-.55**
Self Concept	-.55**	1

Table 4 demonstrates a statistically significant negative association between prospective teachers' self-concept and test anxiety. At $p < 0.05$, the correlation coefficient, $r = -.55$, is significant.

Table 5 ANOVA for difference among mean scores of test anxiety and self concept of prospective teachers in three universities

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Test Anxiety Score	Between Groups	720.567	2	360.283	5.18	.006
	Within Groups	15035.881	216	69.611		
	Total	15756.447	218			
Self Concept Score	Between Groups	1053.300	2	526.650	10.447	.000
	Within Groups	10888.490	216	50.410		
	Total	11941.790	218			

Conclusion

Considering the study's focus on the relationship between test anxiety and self-concept, it was discovered that, generally speaking, men prospective teachers had greater self-concept and lower test anxiety than female prospective teachers. It demonstrates that their reduced levels of exam anxiety were caused by improved self-concept. This significant conclusion is in line with research by Xu et al. (2005) and Zeidner & Schlever (1999), which discovered that students' test anxiety is reduced when they have a high level of self-concept. Subsequent studies also looked into how students' poor self-perception negatively affects their self-concept, which in turn increases students' exam anxiety. Another significant finding of the study is the strong correlation between test anxiety and self-concept. This finding is consistent with a finding made by Hembree (1988), who claimed that low student performance is linked to the cognitive component of test anxiety, which can be increased by self-comparison with peers on performance, fear of failure, a decline in self-confidence, and a weakening of self-esteem (Deffenbacher, 1980; Hembree, 1988; Morris, Davis, & Hutchings, 1981). Male prospective teachers had lower levels of test anxiety than female prospective teachers, according to another noteworthy finding of the study. This finding is consistent with several research studies that have examined the idea that females experience higher levels of test anxiety than males (Chapell et al., 2005; Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Bandalos et al., 1995; Mwamwenda, 1994). Cassady and Johnson (2002) went on to state that test anxiety varies depending on the gender of aspiring teachers.

Students of both sexes experience exam anxiety to the same extent, while females are more emotionally invested. The majority of male candidates for teaching had little test anxiety, indicating that they are less likely to perform poorly on exams. This finding is noteworthy because it is consistent with research published by Zeidner (1990), who found that gender differences in scholastic ability account for the differences in test anxiety scores between males and girls.

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