

## Perception of undergraduates on study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety in Kwara, Nigeria

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: November 11, 2021  
Revised: February 24, 2022  
Accepted: March 15, 2022

#### Keywords

anxiety;  
examination;  
strategies;  
undergraduates;  
university.

### ABSTRACT

Examination anxiety has made students fail their examinations, causing many problems, including depression and suicide. The study aimed to investigate study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduate students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The influence of gender, academic level, and age on strategies for handling examination anxiety were also investigated. A descriptive survey was adopted, with a sample of 250 respondents selected through a multistage sampling procedure to participate. Data was collected through Study Habit for overcoming Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (SHEAQ). The instrument was validated by four experts in measurement and has a good reliability coefficient obtained through test re-test. One research question and three hypotheses guided the study. Based on data analysis with t-test and ANOVA, hypothesis 1 was retained, while hypotheses 2 and 3 were rejected. Findings showed that overcoming examination anxiety as perceived by respondents are: reviewing what was taught, having adequate time for study, and testing oneself, among other strategies. Findings also showed no significant difference in the strategies for overcoming examination anxiety based on gender; significant differences were found based on academic level and age. Therefore, students should be counseled on the need to develop good study habits to pass examinations.

### Introduction

The examination outcome determines success or failure in the academic endeavor. The examination is not the real taste of knowledge acquired after the instructional process. Yet, it is the yardstick for measuring the effectiveness, success, or failure of educational instruction at the end of instruction. The examination can be written in essays, open-ended, objectives, and matching tests. It could also be an oral examination in the form of an oral interview. All over the world, either written or oral examination is used to assess instructional outcomes in learning institutions. The examination applies to grade learners for promotion to the next class or level, placement, and admissions to higher educational institutions. An examination is periodically taken to test and measure the success of students after they have been exposed to a learning experience. One issue that makes students fail in the examination is examination anxiety.

No matter the mode it takes, examination generates anxiety in the examinee. The anxiety level depends on the examinee's preparedness before the examination. Anxiety is the inner unpleasant disposition and feelings usually characterized by sweating, shortness of

breath, shivering, uneasiness, and worry. Examination anxiety is a negative effect, worry, and psychological arousal, leading to the behavioral response of failure or lack of competence in examination (Matthew et al., 2006). Pagaria (2020) defined test anxiety as a psychological condition that causes outrageous distress and anxiety during the period of testing. Anxiety is the exaggerated state of apprehension, with feelings of uneasiness resulting in stress and fear of an imminent danger (Akinade, 2001). Examination anxiety is the type of anxiety people face during the examination period, which can linger to the post-examination. Even though anxiety during the examination period is normal, it becomes a problem when the anxiety poses a threat to the examinee. Anxiety can lead to failure in an examination; it causes examination fever, making students miss their examinations. Examination anxiety could affect the academic performance of students (Mohammed et al., 2017; Yusefzadeh et al., 2019). Some students who express anxiety during examinations might be afraid of examinations and play truancy and absenteeism. When students are persistently absent from school, failure in the examination is inevitable. Chukwu (2014) noted that students are anxious during examinations. The anxiety occurs in all categories of students regardless of age (Solanke, 2014), mainly students who are consistently absent in class when a teacher is teaching.

Curbing examination anxiety among students requires proactive strategies that could impact examination anxiety. Planning and strategizing geared towards reducing examination anxiety is a task that requires teachers' efforts, school authorities, and other stakeholders in education. Teachers who deliver a course of instruction and conduct examinations could curb examination anxiety through their teaching method and the questions set in the examination. A teacher who dedicated little or no time to teaching would be mounting high anxiety in the students, who would be very anxious and afraid of what kinds of questions would come out in the examination. Parents could be blamed for their children's anxiety during examination because they threaten their children to do well to avoid being disgraced by society (Olayinka & Omoegun, 2000).

Ogunsanya & Buraimo (2020) recommended that regular counseling services be introduced to students to train them on study habits and strategies to excel in their academic work. The school authority could contribute to examination anxiety by preparing an examination timetable, so students are not given enough time to prepare. Examination dates and times are not given enough space. A reasonable examination timetable could allow students to prepare well for the examination and easily take it. On the contrary, an examination timetable that allows students to sit for three or more exams a day will generate high examination anxiety.

Examination anxiety does not view gender. Male and female examinees struggle with examination anxiety. As reported in Olatoye & Afuwape (2003) research finding, gender differences do not mean significant differences in cognitive test anxiety. However, Chukwu (2014) study on test anxiety among Secondary school students showed that male students exhibit higher test anxiety than female students. Solanke (2014) revealed that age did not matter when it comes to examination anxiety because students, irrespective of age, showed no significant difference in their perception of the factors responsible for examination anxiety. Anxiety is likely to occur when students are not adequately prepared for the examination. The way to adequately prepare for the examination is to imbibe a good study habit strategy. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate study habit strategies that could help students overcome examination anxiety, fill the knowledge gap, and contribute to existing knowledge on examination anxiety.

The problem is that students sometimes fail examinations due to a lack of good study habits. Many students did not know they needed to plan for their studies to avoid examination

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anxiety that might make them fail their examinations. Poor study habit leads to failure in examination. Students who perform poorly in examinations are not happy doing so. Examination anxiety is an emotional problem that could result in neurotic difficulties. [Trifoni & Shahini \(2011\)](#) noted that examination anxiety gives rise to physical and psychological problems, which could lead to emotional breakdown resulting in possible damage to the individual's personality. Poor academic performance among students has a lot of negative consequences. Students who perform poorly in the examination are not happy about doing so. Some students do sleep in the class overnight to study. Female students could run into the danger of rape by sleeping in the lecture halls and classrooms. Cultists could also attack students at night in the classrooms.

Some criminal activities are going on in school resulting from failure in examinations. Some students who fail examinations play truancy, go into hard drugs, drop out of school, join cult activities, become alcoholics and some attempt or commit suicide. These negative consequences call for a study that will investigate study habit strategies to help students overcome examination anxiety. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to investigate the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin. It also investigated the influence of gender, academic level, and age variables on the participants' perception of study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety.

One research question was raised to guide the conduct of this study thus: What are the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety among undergraduates in Kwara State? Three hypotheses were postulated to guide the study as follows: (1) There is no significant difference in respondents' perception of the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety based on gender; (2) There is no significant difference in respondents' perception of the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety based on an academic level; (3) There is no significant difference in respondents' perception of the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety based on age

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey enables the researcher to obtain the opinion of a representative sample of the target population to infer the perception of the entire population ([Daramola, 2006](#)). A descriptive survey approach was considered appropriate for this study. The researcher is interested in collecting information from a representative sample of undergraduates of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, to find out the perceived study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety among undergraduates of the University of Ilorin.

### ***Participants***

The population for this study consisted of all undergraduates at Kwara State Universities. The target population comprised undergraduates of the University of Ilorin. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select 250 sample students that participated in the study. At stage 1, a convenient sampling technique was used to select the University of Ilorin out of five universities in Kwara State. In stage 2, a simple random sampling technique was used to select students from the University of Ilorin to participate. Students in their 100, 200, 300, 400, and 500 levels, that is, students in their first year, second year, third year, fourth and fifth year, were selected from Faculties of Law, Education, Management Sciences, Social

Sciences, and Agricultural Sciences. The order of student selection was 100 level (54 students), 200 level (103 students), 300 level (60 students), and 400 and above level (33 students). The number selected from the various levels was based on the number of students in the various levels. Stratified sampling was used to select the students according to demographic variables of gender, academic level, and age (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1  
*Demographic Data of Respondents*

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	109	43.6
Female	141	56.4
Academic level		
100	54	21.6
200	103	41.2
300	60	24.0
400 and above	33	13.2
Age		
16-19 years	83	33.2
20-23 years	63	25.2
24-26 years	70	28.0
27 years and above	34	13.6

### ***Instruments***

The researchers designed the instrument for this study, titled Study Habit Strategies for overcoming Examination Anxiety (SHSEA), based on the theory of [Skinner \(1954\)](#) on behavioral learning. The instrument is comprised of two sections (A & B). Section A consisted of respondents' demographic information, such as gender, academic level, and age, while Section B consisted of 20 items on study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety. The responses patterned after the Four-Point Likert-type format with options of Strongly Agree (SD) = 4 points; Agree (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point.

Four experts validated the instrument in test and measurement evaluation. The instrument's reliability was obtained through the test re-test method. The questionnaire forms were administered to forty tertiary institution students who were not part of the respondents. After three weeks, the same respondents were given the same instrument to respond. The two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation which yielded a reliability of .78. The questionnaire forms were personally administered to the respondents and collected on the spot to avoid loss. Section B in the instrument was scored by summing up the points and dividing by 4 to obtain the mean score of each item, thus:  $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.50$ . The cut-off mark is 2.50. Any item in the questionnaire that did not score 2.50 and above was not considered study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety.

### ***Data analysis***

Data analyses were conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency, and percentages. Data obtained from the research question was analyzed using mean and rank order, while t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the formulated hypotheses. Hypotheses were tested at a .05 level of significance.

## Results

This study has a research question: What are the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin? [Table 2](#) shows that all the items except 15 and 17 had 2.50 mean scores and above; therefore, all items except items 15 and 17 are perceived as study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety.

Table 2

*Mean and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Perception of Study Habit Strategies for overcoming Examination Anxiety*

Item No	To avoid examination anxiety, one should engage in the following study habits:	Mean	Rank
12	review what they learned in school that day	3.33	1 <sup>st</sup>
1	have adequate time for studying	3.28	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	test oneself periodically	3.25	3 <sup>rd</sup>
20	check work before consider it done	3.16	4 <sup>th</sup>
14	have time for study sessions and breaks	3.07	5 <sup>th</sup>
7	create a pre-studying checklist	3.03	6 <sup>th</sup>
9	find a good reading spot	3.03	6 <sup>th</sup>
11	write during classes	2.97	8 <sup>th</sup>
6	create study plan	2.95	9 <sup>th</sup>
2	create adequate time for studying	2.92	10 <sup>st</sup>
5	cover all course outlines before the examination starts	2.92	10 <sup>th</sup>
13	get at least eight hours sleep everyday	2.88	12 <sup>th</sup>
18	take a break to take care of oneself	2.86	13 <sup>th</sup>
8	create a weekly schedule	2.82	14 <sup>th</sup>
4	have my personal reading timetable	2.77	15 <sup>th</sup>
19	study offline as much as possible	2.76	16 <sup>th</sup>
16	organize lecture note	2.70	17 <sup>th</sup>
10	use coffee while studying	2.58	18 <sup>th</sup>
17	avoid social media	2.48	19 <sup>th</sup>
15	ask question in class when lecture is not understand	2.46	20 <sup>th</sup>

The first hypothesis in this study: there is no significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on gender. [Table 3](#) shows that the calculated t-value of .64 is less than the critical t-value of 1.65 with a corresponding p-value of .524, which is greater than the .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is accepted since the calculated *p*-value is greater than the significance level. This result indicates no significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on gender.

Table 3

*The t-value of the Respondents' View on the Study Habit Strategies for Handling Examination Anxiety Based on Gender*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	<i>p</i>
Male	109	57.84	6.77	248	.64	1.65	.524
Female	141	58.49	8.70				

The second hypothesis in this study: there is no significant difference in the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on the academic level. [Table 4](#) shows that the calculated F-ratio of 55.90 is greater than the critical F-ratio of 2.60 with a corresponding *p*-value of .000, which

is less than the .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated p-value is less than the significance level. This result indicates a significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on the academic level.

Table 4

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Respondents' View on the Study Habit Strategies for Handling Examination Anxiety Based on Academic Level*

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p
Between Groups	6323.732	3	2107.911	55.90*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	9275.452	246	37.705			
Total	15599.184	249				

\*Significant,  $p < .05$

To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out, and the output is shown in Table 5. It shows that respondents at the 100 level had a 66.33 mean difference, the 200 level had a 54.23 mean difference, and the 300 level had a 55.32 mean difference, while those in the 400 level and above had a 62.58 mean score. Those in the 100 level had a mean difference of 66.33 implies that the mean score of respondents in the 100 level is greater than the mean difference of other groups, thus contributing to the significant difference. It means that 100 level students are the ones that had the highest perception of the strategies for overcoming examination anxiety, thereby making them differ significantly from students at other levels.

Table 5

*Scheffe's Posthoc Based on Academic Level*

Variable	Group	Mean difference	p
Academic Level	100	66.33	.843
	200	54.23	1.000
	300	55.32	1.000
	400 & above	62.58	1.000

Sig.  $p < .05$

The third hypothesis in this study: there is no significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on age. Table 6 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 57.64 is greater than the critical F-ratio of 2.60 with a corresponding p-value of .000, which is less than the .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated p-value is less than the significance level, indicating a significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on age.

Table 6

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Respondents' View on the Study Habits Strategies for Handling Examination Anxiety Based on Age*

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p
Between Groups	6439.514	3	2146.505	57.64*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	9159.670	246	37.234			
Total	15599.184	249				

\*Significant,  $p < .05$

To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out, and the output is shown in [Table 7](#). It shows that respondents between 16-19 years had a mean difference of 55.76, 20-23 years had a mean difference of 50.44, 24-26 years had a mean difference of 60.66, and 27 years above had a mean difference of 63.47. These results imply that the mean difference between respondents between 24-26 years of age and those between 27 years and above is greater than the mean difference of other groups, thus, contributing to the significant difference observed. It means that respondents between 24-26 years of age and those between 27 years and above had the most perception of the strategies for overcoming examination anxiety, thereby contributing to the significant difference observed.

Table 7  
*Scheffe Posthoc Based on Age*

Variable	Group	Mean difference	<i>p</i>
Age	16-19 years	55.76	.119
	20-23 years	50.44	.109
	24-26 years	60.66	1.000
	27 and above	63.47	1.000

Sig. *p* < .05

## Discussion

The study showed that the respondents perceived that study habits strategies for overcoming examination anxiety are: reviewing what they learned in school that day, having adequate time for studying, testing themselves periodically, having time for a study session, creating a pre-study checklist, finding a good reading spot, creating and following study plan, among other strategies. This finding supports [Ipaye's \(2005\)](#) study, which noted that students must have a study time schedule and know when to study. The finding also aligns with [Bentil et al. \(2020\)](#), who asserted that not having good study habits and skills was the dominant examination anxiety among in-school adolescents. A previous study conducted by [Agubosi & Akerele \(2017\)](#) also supported the finding by noting that poor study habits could make students not perform well in the examination

The study finding implies counseling practice. When appropriate study habit is imbibed, examination anxiety can be overcome. Lack of adequate preparation for examination causes fear and its attendant failure in the examination. School counselors must counsel students on reading through good study habits to pass their examinations. The students can be given individual or group counseling as the case may be. One of the objectives of having school counselors is to help the students do well in academics; therefore, the school counselor should wake up to that responsibility.

Hypothesis one revealed no significant difference in the respondents' perception of study habit strategies for overcoming examination based on gender. This result implies that male and female respondents were not different in their perception of the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety. The finding was probably because both genders know the importance of good study habits during the examination period. The finding supports [Lawrence \(2014\)](#) study, which discovered no significant difference between higher secondary school boys and girls in their study habits and test anxiety. The finding also aligns with [Cassady & Johnson \(2002\)](#), who stated that gender differences do not mean significant differences in test anxiety. The finding is not consistent with [Pagaria \(2020\)](#), who found a significant difference in test anxiety between male and female college students on test anxiety. The finding did not support a study from [Tsegay et al. \(2019\)](#), which found that test

anxiety is more prevalent in women than in men gender. The finding did not also support [Numan & Hasan \(2017\)](#), who found that girls experience a higher level of test anxiety than boys. Still, girls exhibit better study habits and excel more academically than boys.

Hypothesis two showed a significant difference in the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on the academic level. The finding might be so because students at different levels might not have the same study habit strategy. Students in 100 levels (freshers) might have more examination anxiety because they are beginners who might need to know more about the study habit strategies to overcome examination anxiety. Others with higher levels who have taken the examination for granted may not need to know more about overcoming examination anxiety. The finding parallels [Numan & Hasan \(2017\)](#), who found differences in the effect of study habits on test anxiety of undergraduates from different academic levels. The finding is consistent with [Hanfesa et al. \(2020\)](#), who discovered that many first-year students had test anxiety.

Hypothesis three revealed a significant difference in the study habit strategies for handling examination anxiety as perceived by undergraduates of the University of Ilorin based on age. This result implies that respondents' perceptions of the study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety differed based on age. The finding might probably be so because there is maturity based on age. Older students should have good study habits than younger ones. The finding negates [Sharma's \(2017\)](#) study, which found no significant difference in the effect of anxiety and study habit on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students irrespective of age. The finding of [Solanke \(2014\)](#) further negates the finding in the research that found no significant influence of age on the perception of students on the factors responsible for examination anxiety

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that: (1) school counselors should counsel the students on the need to develop good study habits to excel in their academic performance, and (2) teachers should inculcate the habit of studying well to students before the examination to avoid unnecessary examination anxiety, (3) the school counselors should organize seminars where students would be equipped with skills on how to prepare for the examination to avoid anxiety during the examination, and (4) the school authority and the government should provide enabling environment devoid of distractions so that students will concentrate in their studies. This study's limitation is that the financial limitation has become the obstruction to increasing the number of respondents. Therefore further research can be carried out in another locale with more participants.

## Conclusion

Study habit strategies for overcoming examination anxiety are: reviewing what was learned in school that day, having adequate time for studying, creating a pre-study checklist, finding a good reading spot, creating a study plan, testing oneself periodically, and having time for study sessions, and breaks. Findings also showed no significant difference in the respondents' perception based on gender, but significant differences existed based on academic level and age.

## Acknowledgment

The researchers acknowledge the Department of Counsellor Education and the University of Ilorin that permitted the conduct of the study. Also, the undergraduates of the University of Ilorin who participated in the study. The supervisors and the lecturers validated the

instrument for data collection. And the typist that typed the manuscript. The researchers are grateful for your assistance in seeing that the article is worthy of publication.

### Declarations

**Author contributions:** LAA organizes the research and collects and analyzes the data. FAO contributes to data collection. ASK contributes to proofreading the manuscript. OEM contributes to designing the instrument and collecting the data.

**Funding statement.** The researchers themselves funded the research.

**Conflict of interest.** The authors had no conflict of interest in carrying out the research.

**Additional information.** The researchers declare that the study will be helpful to learners who take the examination because, through it, they will learn the strategies to adopt to overcome examination anxiety.

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