

RESEARCH REPORTS

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEST ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EGOR LOCALITY OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT *The study investigated emotional intelligence and test anxiety among secondary school students in Egor Locality of Edo State, Nigeria with a view to guide them to overcome the usual fear syndrome associated with examinations. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population consisted of 6069 (six thousand and sixty-nine) students in the 10 (ten) public Senior Secondary Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. A sample size of 380 (three hundred and eighty) secondary school class 2 students, were randomly selected from five randomly selected secondary schools in the study area. Two instruments, the Schutte self-report Emotional intelligence test (Schutte et al., 1998) and the Test Anxiety Questionnaire (Nist & Diehl, 1990) were adapted to collect data for the study. Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test were adopted to analyse the data. Findings indicated a moderate level of test anxiety among the students, though not found to be dependent on the sex of students. A non-significant negative correlation was also found to exist between emotional intelligence and test anxiety. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government should continue to deploy professional counsellors to schools to assist in improving the usual fear syndrome associated with examinations among students. In addition, school counsellors as a routine service, should provide students with skills to improve emotional intelligence and strategies that would help to overcome test anxiety.*

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Test anxiety, Secondary School, Students

Introduction

The issue of test anxiety among school students, especially at the secondary school level in Nigeria is real and calls for concern. Anxiety, during the examination period has led students to commit various examination infractions and malpractices (Adeyemi & Ige, 2002). The issue is more critical at the secondary school level, that being the level at which certificate examinations, such as General Certificate Examinations, West African School Certificate Examinations, National School Certificate Examinations and others take place. It is at this level also that Matriculation Examinations to higher institutions take place. The series of examinations including the intra-school grade examinations tend to create fears and anxious moments in students who are mainly adolescents. Anxiety is a universal human feeling, which can be experienced by an individual from time to time. It

involves a sense of apprehension and unease about something or a situation the outcome of which bears some element of uncertainty. (Ahamad & Aziz, 2019). They further listed some of the symptoms associated with anxiety such as nervousness, tense feelings, elevated heart rate, quivering, profuse perspiration, uneven breathing, poor concentration or thinking about anything other than the cause of the present worry. It is a complex response to real or perceived threats. Moreover, Olarerewaju and Adeoye (2018) revealed that anxiety in small amounts can be of benefit to an individual as it can serve as an alarm system, alerting an individual's attention to potential dangers or negative outcomes; to the authors, a little anxiety can keep an individual motivated, thus leading to improved productivity and positive change among learners. Excessive anxiety however, is counterproductive as it can have a general negative impact on an individual. Aydin (2017) asserted that test anxiety is a negative emotional response to a current or prospective situation involving evaluation. It is a psychological situation in which a person experiences distress in testing situations. While many students do experience some degree of anxiety before and during examinations, test anxiety impairs learning and performance in tests. One of the common worries of students is test failure and this could be because tests are anxiety-provoking situations.

This study is therefore aimed at investigating the level of test anxiety amongst the secondary school students in Egor Locality of Edo State, Nigeria; and finds the relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among the students.

Literature Review

Test anxiety is a physiological over-arousal often referred to as “emotionality” along with dread, worry and expectations of terrible failure, which occurs before or during test situations (Tom & Ansia, 2017). Test anxiety is often exhibited by learners at all levels of education and may be caused by inadequate preparation for assessment and evaluation exercises. Test anxiety has been found to predict students academic achievements (Ilo & Unachukwu, 2020), as such anxiety could interfere with students concentration on the test, thus affecting their academic achievements. Some studies have found sex differences in test anxiety (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2019; Onukwufor & Ugwu, 2018) while others found no significant sex difference in the exhibition of test anxiety among learners (Eruvenkai & Simon, 2021).

Another factor that may affect individuals in the academic setting is emotional intelligence. Tom and Ansia (2017) defined emotional intelligence as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. The concept of emotional intelligence describes a person's capability to perceive emotional information accurately and effectively, and process and regulate such information within a person and concerning other persons. Amalu (2017) postulated that anxiety involves the capability to use emotional information as a compass to channel a person's line of thought and actions in harmony with those of other persons. Mayer and Salovey (1997) also opined that emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

Emotional intelligence could influence academic performance. Yahaya et al. (2012) found that three elements of emotional intelligence, which include self-awareness, emotional management and empathy, are significantly related to academic achievement in their study. Supporting this position, Sanchez-Alvarez et al. (2015) found a significant effect of emotional intelligence on academic performance in their work on the meta-analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance in secondary education, using a multi-stream comparison approach.

Regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety, Tom and Ansia (2017) and Malik et al. (2013) found a significant negative correlation between test anxiety and emotional intelligence among adolescents in schools. Furthermore, Ahamadpanah et al. (2016) found that higher emotional intelligence was related to lower test anxiety. Eruvenkai and Simon (2021) also conducted a study on emotional intelligence and test anxiety among adolescent students in Mumbai; they used a sample of 104 students out of which 74 were females and 30 males. They made use of “The Shuttle’s Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test” developed by Shuttle et al (1998) for emotional intelligence; and “Test Anxiety scale” developed by Asamoah and Songnalle (2012) for test anxiety. They analysed the data collected using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test in testing the formulated hypotheses. Their findings showed that there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety. Test anxiety is an emotional feeling that one experiences and expresses in a testing situation. Test anxiety is an expression of fear and dread of the testing situation to the extent that it impairs academic performance. Such anxiety may be due to internal factors such as lack of trust in one’s ability or capacity to overcome pre-test situation or may be externally motivated, such as perceived difficulty of particular subject or subjects in the curriculum. For example, many students are usually scared of mathematics and hard sciences. Ngwoke et al. (2013) has observed that Nigerian students at all levels of education exhibit high levels of test anxiety in testing situations affect behaviour of individuals and emotional intelligence.

Rationale for the Study

Literature regarding test anxiety among Nigeria students has been in the areas of its effects on academic performance (Onyekwuru & Ibegbunam, 2014; Ilo & Unachukwu, 2020); sex relatedness as well as its relationship with the levels of education (Oladapo & Ogungbamila, 2013; Onukwufor & Ugwu, 2018); and effects of academic self-confidence (Lawal, Idemudia & Adewale, 2017) among others. There is, however, a dearth of literature on the relationship, if any, that exists between the concept of emotional intelligence and the concept of test anxiety among students at the secondary school level in Nigeria. This study, therefore, is to fill the gap by ascertaining the relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety amongst students at the secondary school level in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria; and to determine the level of test anxiety and sex differences in test anxiety among students. The findings from the study will guide school counselling and inform improved deployment of professional counsellors to schools. It is hoped that the findings will also enable students to overcome test anxiety.

The study tested the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the level of test anxiety between male and female students.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among secondary school students.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using the correlation approach. The target population consisted of six thousand and sixty-nine (6069) students in ten (10) public senior secondary schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Public schools were used because of the public investment in the schools, as the students enjoy free education; they are also better regulated. Three hundred and eighty students in secondary school class 2 were sampled for the study. This consisted of one hundred and thirty-seven (137) male students and two hundred and forty-three (243) female students. The study employed simple random sampling technique to select five schools from the ten public secondary schools in the study area. After due consent had been obtained from the school authorities, eighty secondary school Grade 2 students were randomly selected from each of the five selected schools.

Two research instruments were used to collect data for the study. They are:

1. The self-report emotional intelligence test, adapted from Schutte et al. (1998). The instrument consists of ten items, measuring appraisal and expression of emotions, regulation of emotions and utilisation of emotions. It requires responses on a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach alpha statistic which yielded a reliability coefficient of .799.
2. The test anxiety questionnaire by Nist and Diehl (1990) was adapted and tested for reliability using Cronbach alpha statistic which gave a value of 0.82. The test was designed with response options on a 5-point scale of never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. Section A of the instrument sought demographic information of the respondents. To obtain the level of test anxiety, a mean value of between 10 and 19 was considered to represent low test anxiety; a mean value of between 20 and 35 was considered moderate test anxiety; and a mean value above 35 was considered to be high test anxiety.

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research question 1. Research questions 2 and 3 were hypothesised and independent sample t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1. What is the level of test anxiety among the secondary school students in the study?

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation for the level of test anxiety among secondary school students

N	Mean	SD
380	29.56	5.779

The result in Table 1 indicates that the mean of test anxiety of the respondents is 29.56. This falls within the range of 20-35 which indicates moderate test anxiety. The level of test anxiety among the students in the study is therefore moderate.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the level of test anxiety between male and female secondary school students.

Table 2

Independent sample t-test of the level of test anxiety between male and female students.

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig
Male	137	30.01	5.633	378	1.144	0.000
Female	243	29.31	5.855			

P=0.05

Results in Table 2 showed a computed t-value=1.144 and a p-value 0.000. The t-value of 1.144 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 for the distribution and is significant at p<0.05. The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in test anxiety levels between male and female students is therefore rejected and it is upheld that the test anxiety mean value for males (30.01) is significantly higher than that of the female (29.31).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Test Anxiety Among Secondary School Students.

Variables	N	r	sig (2-tailed)
Emotional intelligence	380	-.038	0.45
Test anxiety			

P =0.05

It can be observed from Table 3 that an r-value of -0.038 and a p-value of 0.458 were obtained after testing at 0.05 level of significance. The calculated p-value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and test anxiety is upheld. There is a non-significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among the respondents in the study.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study show that there is a moderate level of test anxiety among the respondents in the study. This result may be due to the attention being paid to the phenomenon in schools in recent times. Learners' attention is being drawn to the negative effects of test anxiety and how to overcome such anxiety. This result is at variance with the observation made by Ngwoke, Ossai and Obikwelu (2013) that Nigerian students at all levels exhibit high levels of test anxiety in testing conditions. It was also indicated in the findings that there is a significant difference in sex in the level of test anxiety among students in secondary school. Male students have significantly higher test anxiety mean than female students. This, however, may have been occasioned by the high level of distractions of male students concerning schooling in Nigeria of today, whereby they seem to be more attracted to mundane things other than education with the common belief among most male children these days that education does not bring quick and enormous rewards. Boys are attracted to business, sports, music and betting and so on rather than focusing on schooling. Female students are less distracted, they seem to concentrate more in school while the boys wait for the last hour to prepare for examinations. Such a situation could lead to higher pre-test anxiety among male students. Nowadays, most high-flying students are female at all levels of education in Nigeria. Words like "book is scam" and "boko haram'- book is useless" are common on the lips of male students nowadays. The level of seriousness among young boys with education seems to be dwindling because of the growing rate of employment after long period of schooling, coupled with the seemingly low-income level of educated workers. This development tends to distract male students at the detriment of seriousness with study; hence they seem to be tensed up during tests and examinations for lack of adequate preparation. Recent researches in many countries have shown reversal in the academic achievement between males and females, with females doing better in almost all disciplines across all levels of education (Grant & Behrman, 2010; Tshabalala & Ncube, 2016; Opong, 2011). It is observed that these days most young boys in the country now see the artists, music and sports stars as those 'making it' while those they regard as 'bookworms', that is the educated ones as socio-economic strugglers. Such attitude could be inimical to seriousness towards examination preparation and overall academic achievement, this creating unnecessary anxiety towards examination due to ill preparations (Adeyemi, 2020). However, this result is at variance with Eruvenkai and Simon (2021) who found that among secondary school adolescents in Mumbai, India, there was no significant sex difference in the level of test anxiety. This finding is however, in consonance with the findings of Ahmadpanah et al. (2016), Rezazadeh and Tavakoli (2019), Onwukwufor and Ugwu (2018) who found significant sex differences in test anxiety

between male and female students in their studies. The studies also made findings indicating a non-significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and test anxiety. The finding corroborates Eruvenkai and Simon (2021) who had a similar finding while working with adolescent students in Mumbai. It is however, at variance with the findings of Malik et al. (2013), Tom and Ansia (2017) and Elder (2019) who reported a significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and test anxiety among students in their various studies. Although the correlation between the two variables was not statistically significant in the present study, it was negative, an indication that enhancing emotional intelligence may be useful or beneficial in reducing test anxiety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the level of test anxiety among secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria was moderate. Students generally exhibit moderate pre-test anxiety irrespective of their sex. However, emotional intelligence may have a weak influence on students' test anxiety.

It is therefore recommended that government should continue to deploy professional counsellors to schools to guide students to overcome the usual examination anxiety. In addition, school counsellors should, as a routine service in academic guidance and counselling, provide students with requisite skills needed to improve their emotional intelligence and strategies to reduce test anxiety which would enable them attain their full potentials in educational attainment.

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