

Examination Anxiety and Curriculum Performance Among Students of Borno State University: Counselling Remedies

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Abstract

It is a difficult task to evaluate students' learning. Tests are one tool that teachers and instructors utilize among many other techniques to evaluate students' work in an unbiased manner. Exams are now a natural part of the society in which we live, as we are aware. As a result, the outcomes of the results are used as the foundation for many significant choices. That test anxiety has emerged as a major issue in classrooms worldwide, hence the interest in this study is test anxiety and how it affects learning, as well as its causes and effects on individuals. The study population is the undergraduate students at Borno State University. A sample of 370 respondents were generated through a random sampling procedure performed the anxiety scale test and responded to a series of questions after that. The findings showed students had examination anxiety, at least somewhat. As for the causes and steps taken to mitigate examination anxiety the result shows that difference in the responses of male and female participants to different questionnaire

Keywords: *testing, exam anxiety, students' performance, counselling remedies*

Introduction

The idea of evaluation, which is sometimes referred to as knowledge control, dates back to ancient times. To help his students develop critical thinking skills, Socrates employed questionnaires with sequential questions. Approximately in the fifth century BC, the similar phenomena were noted in Rome. Oral questioning, which originated in the University of Bologna in 1219 and required pupils to respond orally to questions posed in Latin, was the customary method of controlling knowledge in Europe. With the introduction of the first written exams in Europe in 1792, in addition to oral exams, the University of Cambridge in England served as the beginning point. Exams, particularly verbal ones, have been utilized for ages, first in Europe and then in America, as we can see. This suggests that an important aspect of teaching has been and continues to be the evaluation of students' work. It is a difficult task to evaluate and rank the learning of students. Teachers and instructors employ several tools and techniques, including testing, to arrive at an objective evaluation of their performance. We are aware that testing is now a fundamental aspect of modern society. It is now used more widely in all areas of life, not just education, and test results are a major factor in many significant decisions. Two authorities in the field, Spielberger and Vag (1995), concur with this viewpoint. According to Akinwale, & Oluwafemi (2022), applicants are increasingly being evaluated for jobs and entrance to school programs based not only on their academic performance but also on their achievement test scores. As a result, test anxiety and exam stress have spread across contemporary society. Another well-known expert on test anxiety, Sarason (1990), expressed a similar opinion when he said, "We live in a test-conscious, test-giving culture in which people's lives are in part determined by their test performance." At this point, it's critical to stress that, despite tests' high levels of validity and reliability, it is impossible to know if the findings accurately represent students' knowledge or skills.

Test anxiety is a significant aspect that has to be taken into account. Almutairi, et al (2024), highlight that a common misconception regarding test anxiety originates from this. Test anxiety is distinct from the typical anxiousness we feel when taking an exam. It is a totally typical reaction for almost everyone to feel anxious when faced with a tough assignment. The current study primarily focuses on test anxiety and how it affects students' learning and performance. The performance. This relates to the background of most of the students, as term test or examination is mentioned, by the lecturer the students apparently exhibits dislikes of the test or examination as the case maybe.

Examination Anxiety and Curriculum Performance: Examination anxiety and curriculum performance are intricately linked, with each influencing the other in complex ways. Understanding this relationship is crucial for educators, policymakers, and students themselves to develop effective strategies for mitigating anxiety and optimizing academic achievement. The Impact of examination anxiety on curriculum performance examination anxiety can significantly impair students' ability to perform well on exams and, by extension, affect their overall curriculum performance. When students experience high levels of anxiety, it can: (a) Impair cognitive functioning*: Anxiety can reduce working memory capacity, making it more difficult for students to recall information and solve problems. (b) Decrease motivation Chronic anxiety can lead to decreased motivation and interest in academic pursuits. (c) Affect time management*: Anxiety can cause students to become overwhelmed, leading to poor time management and reduced productivity. (d) Influence emotional well-being*: Excessive anxiety can negatively impact students' emotional well-being, leading to decreased self-esteem and confidence. The relationship between curriculum design and examination anxiety The design and structure of the curriculum can also contribute to examination anxiety. Factors such as: Curriculum overload, excessive content and workload can contribute to feelings of overwhelm and anxiety. Assessment methods, high-stakes exams and rigid assessment methods can exacerbate anxiety. Lack of flexibility Inflexible curriculum design can fail.

Literature review

People experience anxiety on a regular basis in their daily lives. Anxiety is defined as a tense, disturbing feeling of tension that arises from the anticipation of a vague but potentially dangerous Hopwood, (2023). Researchers have classified anxiety into other sub-categories, such as language anxiety, speech anxiety, and social anxiety, due to the inherent nature of this issue. We will focus on one of these categories, test anxiety, as was previously discussed. Since the 1950s, test anxiety as a phenomenon has drawn a lot of attention. It is regarded as a prevalent issue in education, denoting a state in which pupils lack self-assurance in their skills, a condition that is particularly evident in their performance and exam outcomes. A research by Spielberger (1962) with college students lends more credence to this point of view. It showed that 26 out of 129 high-anxious students departed for the same reason, whereas only 8 out of 138 low-anxious students left due to academic failure.

Test anxiety, according to Zeidner (1998), is a collection of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral reactions that go hand in hand with worries about potential drawbacks or failing a test or other comparable assessment scenario. Zeidner's claim indicates that there is a high correlation between test anxiety and the consequences of failing. This relationship is evident even in the findings of (Sarason and Sarason, 1990), who claim that a highly test-anxious person may not worry about failure, embarrassment, or social rejection when they are not in or anticipating an evaluational setting. However, in instances involving evaluation, these options become viable. It's important to stress that children who experience exam anxiety are not inherently less intelligent or motivated. Academic performance is hampered by test anxiety and other related deficiencies. The study by Liebert & Morris

(1967) must be taken into consideration in order to comprehend how test anxiety influences students' performance. Sarason and Mandler's Questionnaire (TAQ: Sarason & Mandler, 1952) was used by these researchers to examine student replies. According to the findings, there were two main components to measure anxiety. The initial element was emotionality, which dealt with the bodily responses to examination circumstances, such as anxiety, perspiration, glancing at the time all the time, pencil-tapping, and so forth. Worry, or the cognitive or psychological component of exam anxiety, was the second factor. "Cognitive concern(s) about the consequences of failure are the primary source of worry," according to Liebert & Morris (1967). This is not unexpected because test anxiety in students is something that cannot be understood by a teacher.

Furthermore, it is impossible to assess or measure the true levels of test anxiety among kids. All that was discernible was the students' emotional reactions, which were previously mentioned as a sign of exam nervousness. In a sample of high school students, Morris and Zahra, et al (2022). discovered that worry had a higher negative link with performance results than emotionality. This implies that the most significant influence on performance in such circumstances will come from cognitions or beliefs about the evaluation scenario. Given the multitude of causes of these phenomena, a great deal of research has been done to determine how test anxiety impacts performance. Per one analysis of the studies, for instance, some research indicates that inadequate study habits among students are the primary cause of test anxiety. According to those researches, some students process or arrange information inefficiently, which affects how well they do on tests.

According to research by Naveh-Benjamin et al. (1987), pupils who are extremely test-nervous find it difficult to organize the information they need to acquire compared to less anxious students. According to multiple studies, students who are really nervous about tests tend to study less well than those who are not as nervous (Culler and Holahan, 1980, Dana, & Aminatun, 2022). This perspective is further reinforced by (Hembree 1988, Lovett, et al 2024). who contends that inadequate study techniques lead to subpar performance in assessment situations, which heightens anxiety about performing. These research' findings imply that study techniques can lessen test anxiety and enhance performance. Now is the critical moment to address Zeidner's (1998) viewpoint on the matter. Test anxiety, he says, cannot be justified by bad work or exam performance because it affects even the most dedicated and industrious students. He contends that learning and comprehending the material taught in class directly depend on information processing processes, which are critical to academic success.

According to Mealey & Host (1992), Working memory, concentrated attention, and long-term memory retrieval are some of these functions. Test anxiety is one personality trait that can affect these processes. Other research indicates that "the habitual, irrelevant, negative thoughts that some students have during a testing situation" (Mealey & Host, 1992) contend that it is a substantial contributor to anxiety.

In the view of Mealey and Host (1992), mainly the following are categories of students with exams anxiety:

Lack sufficient study and test-taking techniques, are aware of this shortcoming, are concerned about their exam-taking readiness, and know they are ill-prepared.

Have sufficient coping mechanisms in place and employ them, yet lose focus when taking tests.

Falsely think they have sufficient techniques, perform poorly on exams, and fretfully wonder why.

According to Sarason (1980), other elements that cause anxiety in learners include their ability, the difficulty of the assignment, their fear of receiving low grades, and their lack of test preparation. In a

similar vein, students who experience significant levels of anxiety find it harder to focus. Additionally, he makes the case that there is strong evidence that evaluational stressors negatively impact the performance of people who are extremely test apprehensive when they are faced with hard tasks.

This effect is less pronounced the simpler the assignment. In terms of task complexity, Gaudry and Spielberger (1971) appear to have similar opinions. Their study's findings demonstrated that while low-anxious individuals outperformed high-anxious individuals on easy activities, high-anxious individuals underperformed on difficult ones. Zeidner's (1998) study, which indicated that test anxiety is more harmful when applied to challenging tasks, supports this claim.

According to research on test anxiety, test validity, time constraints, test procedures, format, length, testing setting, and test instructions' clarity are some of the elements that affect how students respond to exams (Young, 1999). When discussing the significance of test validity, we should bring up Young's (1991) research, which shows that students become anxious when faced with material that was not covered in class. Time constraints are another element that raises exam anxiety and has an impact on performance. Ohata (2005) states that students occasionally felt under pressure to think they had to put their ideas into order quickly. The use of improper testing methods is another element that has a detrimental impact on students' performance. (Young 1991, Butakor, & Mingah, (2024), discovered that after spending hours studying for an exam, students experienced anxiety when they encountered unfamiliar question types on the test. Finally, (Ohata, 2005, Albalawi, 2024), showed that the majority of study participants acknowledged that they were afraid of exams because they would worry about the implications of receiving a low score in test-taking scenarios. Numerous research have established this outcome. Additionally, studies show that anxiety has a detrimental impact on performance at both the university and school levels. By administering a standard exam on their course to a group of first-year female students, Paul and Eriksen (1964) investigated the impact of anxiety. The pupils knew that their final grade will be determined by the results of this test. They were given a parallel version of the test they had previously taken and instructed to complete a questionnaire on test anxiety as soon as possible. However, this time, it was made clear that the results would not be used to determine their grade. Upon analysis of the data, it was shown that students with high levels of anxiety scored better on the non-stressful assessment, whereas those with low levels of anxiety performed better in the typical condition.

Test anxiety can occasionally be caused by the kind of test itself. Exams that force pupils to demonstrate their knowledge in ways they are uncomfortable with can cause anxiety in certain students. For instance, when they learn they must take essay exams, some pupils become anxious. Some people get nervous before oral tests. Students may experience anxiety due to a variety of test kinds (Van Blerkomp, 2009). Regarding the circumstances under which test anxiety impairs test performance, researchers differ in their conclusions. Either during study time or test time, it causes disruptions. According to Wine (1980), people who are test-anxious split their focus between actions related to the task at hand and obsessive thoughts about their own shortcomings. Their performance is low because they are not giving their task-directed efforts as much attention.

In addition to these elements, we should bring up Hembree's research (1988). The factors he discovered that contribute to varying test anxiety levels are aptitude, sex, and academic standing. According to other study, males and females respond differently to anxiety (King et al., 2000); women often self-report higher levels of test anxiety symptoms than do men. From this vantage point, it would be crucial to take gender into account when analyzing the findings from outcome measures of self-reported exam anxiety.

There doesn't appear to be much research on test anxiety in Albania. This is the primary justification for our decision to use university students in our research. The fact that this condition affects a sizable proportion of students and lowers their performance is another factor. Given that test anxiety is a complicated and troublesome topic, it is important to identify the issues and offer suggestions for mitigating it that will benefit both students and teachers.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Borno State University (BOSU) which consist of five 5 faculties and the students were drawn from all the faculties, using random sampling techniques. Guided by Morgan population and sample size. The total population of the Borno state university students is 12,000 while the sample stood at 370 respondents.

Instrument

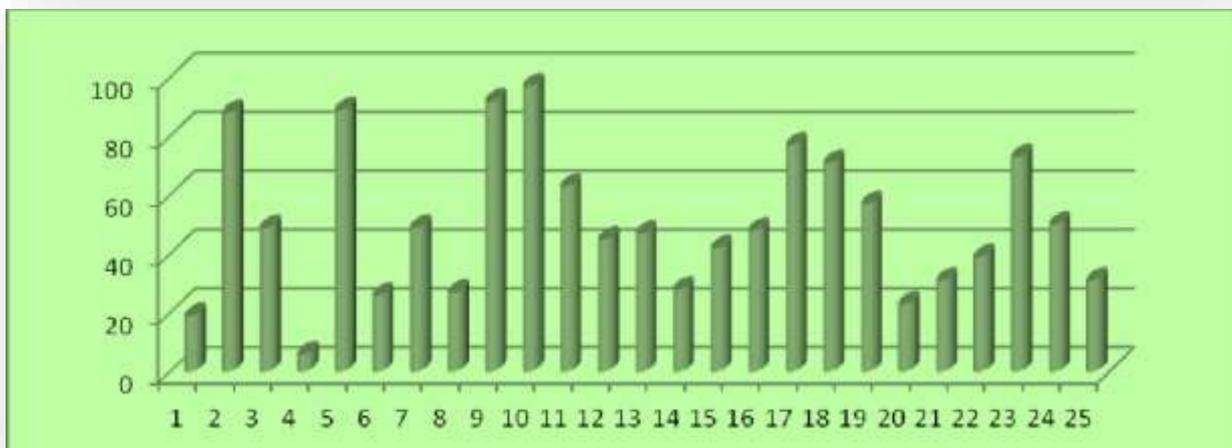
A three-part questionnaire served as the instrument for gathering descriptive data. The purpose of the first section was to gather participant personal data, including age, gender, and year in college. A test anxiety measure based on Sarason's (1980) Test Anxiety measure was included in the second section. A poll with open-ended questions made up the third. The purpose of the test anxiety scale was to gauge the subjects' level of test anxiety. Finally, three main question invaded with sub-open-ended questions were created to look into how participants attributed the causes and effects of exams anxiety. They were as follows:

- From your personal convection what causes examination anxiety at the time of the examination.
- According to your believe, what are the effect of examination anxiety on students.
- What are the persuasion methods to minimized or moderate the level of examination anxiety?
- Administration of the questionnaire to the students was conducted immediately after they were done with their end of semester examination.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to gauge the level of exam anxiety that students were experiencing. The findings suggest that test anxiety affects the participants to some extent. All of the individuals' answers to the questionnaire are shown in the first graph as a percentage.

Figure 1 revealed the descriptive statistics showing degree of exams anxiety experienced by the students.

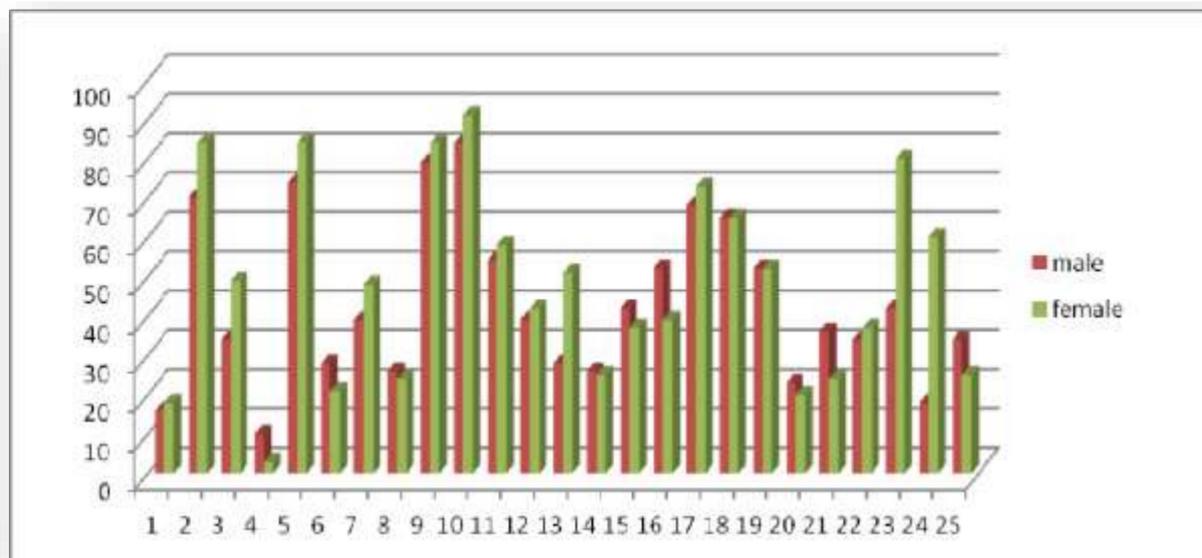


As we can see from the data analysis, the majority of students experience anxiety when taking tests (2), particularly when they are scheduled to take an unexpected exam (5). Furthermore, they lack self-assurance and composure prior to exams (3), whereas following tests, students believe they could have performed better (9). Additionally, they acknowledge that they experience anxiety before final exams (10). Students claim that emotions have a negative impact on their performance (11) and can occasionally lead to forgetting what they have learnt. They frequently have time constraints throughout the test (18) and occasionally worry that they won't pass. Cizek and Burg (2006) provide the following explanation for their belief: "Test anxiety is experienced in testing situations by persons who feel threatened by evaluation, as tests often result in the assignment of a grade or score that is in an evaluation." When a test-taker believes that their performance would likely receive a bad rating, they are more likely to feel threatened. This impression results from the student's belief that their knowledge, skills, or abilities are insufficient to pass the test. It's interesting to note that a test taker's assessment of the threat of evaluation turns out to be somewhat correct because any level of fear that is evoked in them frequently lowers their test performance.

In other words, worry results in a subpar evaluation, which supports the students' preconceived notions about their probability of success and strengthens the idea that evaluation is a frightening experience.

Additionally, the students acknowledged that low grades affect their study and their habits towards studies as well as their exam scores (19), indicating that receiving high grades boosts their self-esteem. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that even when students have studied and are adequately prepared for the test, they nevertheless experience anxiety (23). Students voiced their concerns about a number of these topics. The findings of the survey for both male and female students are displayed in the second graph as a percentage.

Figure 2 shows the difference in the responses of male and female participants to different questionnaire items.



The above graph makes it evident that there is a difference in the responses of male and female participants to different questionnaire items. This suggests that test anxiety is also related to the subjects' gender. The results are further corroborated by a study by Everson and Millsap (1991), which

revealed that women are more emotional and worry more than men. According to the graph, there is a substantial correlation between the individuals' gender and at least five items.

First, when female students are aware that they will be taking an exam, they are more anxious than male students (2). Second, when the girls are aware that they will be taking a test, they are less at ease and confident than the males (3). Third, when it comes to studying for an exam, female students are more anxious than male students (13). Fourth, even when they are well-prepared, female students worry more than male students (23). Finally, compared to male students, female students exhibit a larger degree of emotionality when their hands shake before a significant test (24).

According to the responses gathered from the survey's first question, inadequate test preparation and ineffective or improper test preparation are two factors that contribute to students' anxiety. Students' anxiety is also exacerbated by low self-esteem, fear of receiving a poor grade, and past failed exam experiences in the past. Anxiety is further exacerbated by time constraints and tension during test administration, as many students acknowledge that they are unsure of their ability to complete the test in the allotted time. A significant degree of worry is also brought on by lecturers' inadequate or ambiguous explanations of the content that will be covered in the test.

Additionally, they complain about inaccurate test methods, the test's layout, and the quantity of items it contains. Students also acknowledge that other factors contributing to their anxiousness include the challenging course material and the vast amount of material that needs to be covered. In the end, students experience anxiety when they consider the possibility that they might forget what they have learned and fail as a result. Regarding the survey's second question, the findings indicate that test anxiety primarily has detrimental impacts. The subjects acknowledge that test anxiety makes it harder for them to remember what they have learned and reduces their focus during the test, which leads to more mistakes. Additionally, it stops students from applying their actual performance to test results and from demonstrating their true knowledge and skills in the exam. To put it another way, it stands in the way of effective learning and application of previously learned material.

Additionally, bodily issues are a result of test anxiety. High test-anxiety students admit to experiencing headaches, sleeplessness, elevated heart rates, and stomach issues both before and during the test. They claim that psychological issues are also brought on by test anxiety. We can list heightened anxiety, perplexity, uncertainty, stress, and negative feelings as some of them. The results show that students who experience test anxiety are more engaged in exams and their scores than in the course material. Apart from these drawbacks, test anxiety appears to benefit students as it does not appear to be a factor in their decreased study time. Test anxiety should be reduced primarily by the teacher, according to the responses to the question, "What can be done to alleviate this phenomenon?" According to the students, teachers ought to inspire them and provide them more detailed instructions on the subject matter that will be assessed. To put it another way, students emphasize that teachers should let them know ahead of time about the test's topic and question count. Furthermore, they recommend that teachers refrain from making disparaging remarks during exams and refrain from constantly reminding students of the remaining time. Students also demand that teachers allow them adequate time to finish the test. Students are another factor to consider in order to reduce exam anxiety. They acknowledge that they would feel less nervous before tests if they studied methodically. They contend that educators need to be cognizant of and make an effort to comprehend pupils' anxiousness

Conclusion and Discussion

According to the study's findings, students typically experience test anxiety before to, but particularly during, the test's administration. A significant amount of test anxiety is reported by several of them. The findings indicate that certain components of test anxiety are connected with subject characteristics like gender: despite preparing more than males, female students experience higher levels of worry and anxiety. It reveals that several factors contribute to test anxiety, including inadequate or non-existent test preparation, fear of a poor score, negative test experiences, time constraints and pressure, the quantity of test items, and the complexity of the course material. The poll found that test anxiety also causes psychological and physical issues. It has a detrimental impact on motivation, focus, and performance; it increases exam errors; it makes it difficult to remember previously taught content; and it hinders effective study. Fourth, it finds that the most important elements in lowering test anxiety are the attitudes of the professors. To lessen test anxiety, teachers and instructors should consider several important issues, including test strategies, pre-test orientation, and information on the content and quantity of questions, time constraints, and pressure. Additionally, students should be responsible for conducting the systematic study. Some suggestions can be made in light of the study's findings: Teachers should first understand the validity of examinations and make sure that the course material is reflected in them. Second, teachers should educate students on the test's content, methods, and item count before its administration. This is because Alcala (2002) recommends that teachers should acquaint students with the exam's structure and rating system. Third, establishing a relaxed atmosphere enables students to focus on the test instead of getting side-tracked by test anxiety. Teachers need to understand how anxious their pupils are and figure out how to assess them without making them feel anxious while still creating a productive, good environment. Allowing students to voice their opinions is another strategy to reduce test anxiety in a testing atmosphere. Smith and Rockett (1958), for instance, discovered that when students were required to write comments on things during a multiple-choice examination, the high-anxious levels of anxiety, while the low-anxious students performed worse, the high anxious students performed worse under the "no comment" scenario.

Counselling Remedies for Examination Anxiety:

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Strategies

Students should, as a part of basic life in university, identify and challenge negative thoughts while approaching examinations and reframe catastrophic thinking. Because it interferes with the examination situation. It is also advisable for a student to focus on problem-solving on how to overcome exam anxiety. Mind a time for relaxation before and after examination, which includes Deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, visualization, and mindfulness meditation. Students who approach examinations must put into cognisance emotional regulation strategies such as: recognising and labelling emotions, accepting and validating feelings, developing emotional awareness, practice self-compassion. Another important aspect of examination anxiety remedies is time management and organization: create study schedules, break tasks into manageable chunks, prioritize tasks, and use productivity tools. Self-Care Strategies: are believed to help manage examination anxiety, including exercising regularly, as well as maintaining healthy sleep habits. Eating balanced meals is considered one of the strongest elements that join the body and mind to fight and overcome antibodies. Students should seek support from their teachers for guidance and counselling services. They should also not relent in seeking positive encouragement and affirmations, to focus on strengths, develop growth mind-set.

Counselling Models

The following counselling models are relevant for managing examination anxiety:

- Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).
- Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT).
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

Limitation

We can state that there are certain limitations to this issue. The study is solely available to students at Borno State University, and no other institution. Second, only the study's subject variables students' age, grade, and achievement scores are included. Finally, prior schooling is not a factor. In conclusion, as the study only looked at test anxiety among students at Borno State University, additional research should concentrate on more analytical topics including teacher perspectives on test anxiety and pre- and post-exam comments.

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