

# Examination Anxiety Among Undergraduate Open And Distance Learning Students At Chalimbana University

Brian Mumba  
Dept of Psychology  
Chalimbana University  
Lusaka, Zambia  
mumbab56@gmail.com

Maurice Moono  
Dept of Psychology  
Chalimbana University  
Lusaka, Zambia  
mmoono.75@gmail.com

Rose Chikopela  
Dept of Educational Psychology,  
Sociology and Special Education  
Chalimbana University  
Lusaka, Zambia  
chikopelar@gmail.com

Beatrice Chirwa  
Dept of Sociology  
Chalimbana University  
Lusaka, Zambia  
bchirwa1962@yahoo.com

Edward Makumba  
Dept of Psychology  
Chalimbana University  
Lusaka, Zambia  
Mwalemakumba@gmail.com

## Abstract

This paper details findings of a study which investigated the prevalence and causes of examination anxiety among undergraduate open and distance students at Chalimbana University. The objectives of the study were to establish the prevalence of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance students at Chalimbana University, and establish causes of examination anxiety among the students. The study used a descriptive survey design. The sample comprised one hundred and fifty-one (151) students who were randomly selected to participate in the study. Data was collected through use of an online questionnaire through whatsapp student platforms. The findings revealed that majority of the students experienced examination anxiety as they were writing their examination papers. The study also revealed that students experienced examination anxiety due to less work covered during residential school, inadequate preparation for the examination, so many courses to do, and lecturers not doing much to prepare them for the examination. The study recommends that university management should ensure that students are oriented on examinations, course combination, expectations and overall university culture for the students to easily adapt to the university system.

**Keywords**— Examination anxiety, undergraduate, open and distance students, residential school

## I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a subjective feeling of unease, discomfort, apprehension or fearful concern characterized by a host of autonomic and somatic manifestations. Anxiety is a normal, emotional, reasonable and expected response to real or potential danger (Abdullah & Al-Ameri, 2020). However, if the symptoms of anxiety are prolonged, irrational or severe which can occur in the absence of stressful events or stimuli and interfere with everyday activities, then, these are called anxiety disorders (Shril, 2010). Examination anxiety or test anxiety often involves apprehensions of performing at levels below those at which one is likely to perform or even fear of failure. This type of anxiety may be a product of one's underestimating abilities to perform or unavailable resources

to help an individual perform to desired levels in examinations.

According to Cassady and Johnson (2002) examination anxiety may be a natural reaction to insufficient examination preparation. Hence, too much anxiety during examination may interfere with students' concentration on the test, thus lowering their performance in examination. Dawood (2016) argues other causes of test anxiety include among others, lack of examination preparation, cramming the night before the examination, poor study habits and poor time management.

Vaz et al, (2018) identified factors such as learning process, students' perception related to examination, learning pattern, and the over expectations related to learning outcome influence examination anxiety. Therefore, Karimi and Venkatesan, (2009) have noted that students with severe anxiety experience panic with common physical symptoms which include headache, upset stomach, feeling of fear, shortness of breath, sweating, pacing or fidgeting, crying, racing thoughts and blanking out which negatively affect their examination anxiety.

In addition, Chaurasiya and Gupta (2018) reports that most students experience anxiety at some level during an examination, however, some anxiety is normal and often helpful to stay mentally and physically alert as it only becomes a problem when it affects examination performance. Examination anxiety leads to poor academic performance as it negatively affects a student's social, emotional and behavioral development, as well as their feelings about themselves and school. In extreme cases examination anxiety may cause suicide among students. The symptoms of examination anxiety mainly refer to feeling of tension, nervousness and worry as well as trembling, heart palpitations and the throat being dry (Ormrod, 2011).

### A. Statement of the problem

Studies done by (Katebe, 2022; Dawood, 2016; Duraku, 2017; Chaurasiya and Gupta, 2018) have established that students in universities experience examination anxiety. Chalimbana University like any learning institution administers examinations to all its students, however, the prevalence of examination anxiety among the students is not

known. It is not uncommon to students to panic and being caught with foreign materials in the examination room. Therefore, the study was conducted to determine the prevalence and causal factors of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance students at the university.

### B. Objectives of the study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the prevalence of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance students at Chalimbana University.
- ii. To establish causes of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance education students at Chalimbana University

### C. Theoretical framework

Test Anxiety Theory by Mandler & Sarson (1952) was used in this study. Test anxiety refers to the phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or loss of competence on an exam. Test anxiety is a problem that many distance students frequently experience and if not taken care of might interfere with their learning and exam taking to such an extent that their grades are seriously affected. These students may efficiently study, but because they may engage in anxiety-provoking thoughts, such as fear of failure or desire for perfectionism, they perform poorly. Test-anxious behavior is evoked when a person believes that his or her intellectual, motivational, and social capabilities are taxed or exceeded by demands stemming from the test situation (Zeidner, 2004). The feelings of forgetfulness, or drawing a "blank" are developed because of anxiety-produced interference between relevant responses in an exam and irrelevant responses generated from the person's anxious state. This may result in other consequences such as dissatisfaction with study or procrastination, which may in turn lead to poor academic performance. Test-anxious students may have poor study skills and habits, such as reading without understanding or poor time management, which may also lead to test anxiety, procrastination and poor performance as reactions of the lack of knowledge (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995).

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research design

The study used a descriptive survey design to collect data from undergraduate distance students studying with Chalimbana University. The design was appropriate in that it was able to capture a large number of students. It also gave students an equal opportunity to participate in the study.

### B. Population and Sample

A total of 151 students participated in an online questionnaire using WhatsApp social media platform. The students were randomly selected from schools of education, humanities and social sciences, early childhood, science and mathematics, practical and vocational skills and sports and music. The sample was adequate to give the prevalence of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance students.

### C. Sampling technique

The participants were randomly selected targeting the students who were in the researchers contacts and in the WhatsApp group the researchers had access to. The students were also encouraged to share with other students not in the group WhatsApp platforms.

### D. Data collection instrument and procedure

An online questionnaire was developed and administered to students mainly using WhatsApp social media platform. This proved as a good alternative as at the time the research was being carried out the students were not attending residential school. The questionnaire was developed in such a way that a participant would only respond to one questionnaire.

### E. Data analysis

The data from the survey questionnaire was analysed automatically by Google Forms which provided quick presentation of the data.

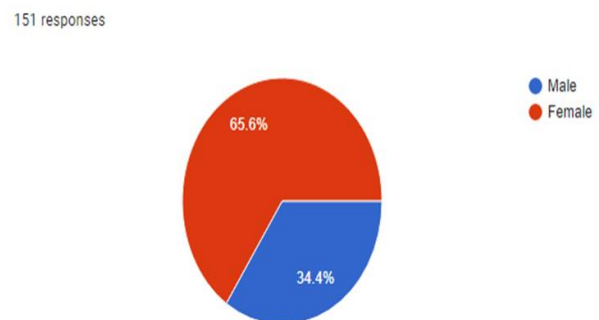
## III. FINDINGS

The findings are based on the online questionnaire administered to distance undergraduate students. The findings are related to gender of participants, prevalence and causes of anxiety among the respondents in the study.

### A. Respondents by Gender

The survey had a total of 151 participants of which 125 respondents (66.6 %) were females and 26 (34.4%) were males.

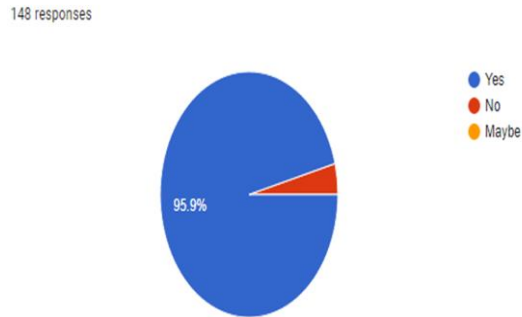
Fig. 1.



The students were asked if they had written an examination at Chalimbana University.

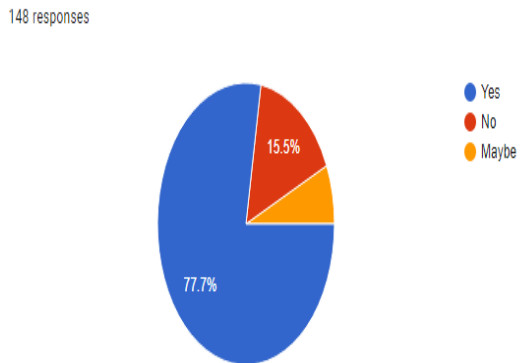
The response was as shown in the pie chart in Fig. 2. The figure indicates that out of 148 respondents, 142 (95.9 %) had written an examination at Chalimbana University and 6 (4.1 %) had not written an examination at Chalimbana University.

Fig. 2.



Students were asked if they had experienced examination anxiety in their last examinations. The responses are represented in the figure below.

Fig. 3.

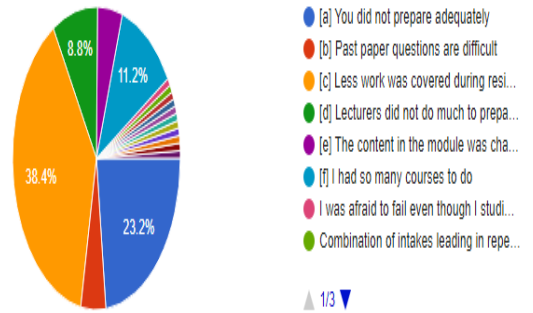


The figure above indicates that out of 148 respondents, 115 (77.7 %) experienced examination anxiety in their last examination, 23 (15.5%) did not experience any examination anxiety and 10 (6.8%) of the respondents were not sure.

The respondents were asked about the reasons for examination anxiety. The responses are shown in the figure below.

Fig. 4.

125 responses



The figure above shows that out of 125 respondents, 43 (38.4%) indicated that less work was covered during residential, 29 (23%) indicated that they did not prepare adequately for the examination, 14 (11.2%) indicated that they had so many courses to do, 11 (8.8%) indicated that lecturers did not do much to prepare them for the examination, 23 (18.6%) had other reasons such as afraid of failing, less work being covered during residential and others.

Respondents were asked if examination anxiety affected their performance.

The results indicates that out of 142 respondents, 113 (79.9 %) felt that examination anxiety affected their performance in the examination and 29 (26.1%) felt that examination anxiety was not a factor in the outcome of their examination results.

Students were asked if distance education had a role in examination anxiety.

The results indicates that out of 143 respondents, 90 (62.9%) felt that distance education had a role in examination anxiety and 53 (37.1%) felt that distance education did not have any role in examination anxiety.

Students were asked how best the university can reduce examination anxiety among distance education students.

Four subthemes emerged; there is need for student orientation; Need for hands on to understand the content; lecturers to set questions based on the content in the module and there is need for students to have modules in all the courses.

**There is need for student orientation**

Most students indicated that there was need for orientation on the courses, examination and overall expectations from the departments in order for the students to understand the best way to handle examinations in the university.

One student indicated that;

*The university needs to fully orient new distance students on the courses that they have chosen to study and have workshops or seminars to teach them how to overcome either stress or anxiety during their study at Chalimbana*

*University if anyone goes through stress, anxiety or any other issues.*

#### **There is need for hands on to understand the content**

Most students revealed that there was need for hands on especially in practical programmes such as natural sciences in order to comprehend the content with less difficulties.

One student postulated that;

*We didn't do a lot of expected practicals in agriculture science due to insufficient time. The university should ensure that results for students are kept jealously, safely and nicely after recording. It's unfair the way we run up and down just looking results for CA*

#### **The need for lecturers to set questions from the content in the module**

Students revealed that there is need to stick the examinations questions to what is contained in the module to reduce panicking and studying beyond what is in the module.

A student indicated that;

*Lecturers should use simple language when coming up with modules because some of the things we can't even understand them as we read and please lecturers should bring questions within the modules not outside we actually depend on modules.*

#### **Students should have modules in all the courses.**

Students revealed that there is need to have modules in all the courses a student is pursuing in that academic year to avoid students looking for information which they may not be sure of. A student said:

*The lecturers should make use of the weeks we come for residential, by lecturing the specific learning outcomes, by ensuring that students have modules because some courses do not have modules, we only downloaded PDFs.*

## IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study looked at prevalence and causes of examination anxiety among undergraduate distance students at Chalimbana University. The respondents were students from five of the six schools at Chalimbana University.

The study revealed that 78 percent of the respondents experienced examination anxiety at Chalimbana University. The study resonates with the findings by Mukolwe (2015) who conducted a study on examination anxiety among secondary school learners in Kenya. The study revealed that majority of students experienced exams anxiety. In addition, the study is also in line with the study by (Abdullah and Al-Ameri, 2020; Katebe, 2022), they found that most university students experienced some level of examination anxiety. For instance, Abdullah and Al-Ameri (2020) found that 47.3% experienced mild level of examination anxiety, 18.2% and moderate level of examination anxiety 34.5%, and that (28.0%) of female students have severe and extremely severe levels of examination anxiety more than (19.2%) of male students. The findings show that examination anxiety is prevalent in all learning institutions. It is imperative that authorities are aware about the adverse effects of examination anxiety on

student performance and overall social functioning in their academic life.

The study revealed that out of 125 respondents, 43 respondents (38.4%) indicated that less work was covered during residential, 29 respondents (23%) indicated that they did not prepare adequately for the examination, 14 respondents (11.2%) indicated that they had so many courses to do, 11 respondents 8.8% indicated that lecturers did not do much to prepare them for the examination, 23 respondents (18.6) had other reasons. The results are in conformity with the findings by (Bentil, Donkor, Oti and Adzifome, 2020; (Nnorom, Anyanwu and Stephen, 2020; Mohamadia, 2014), they found that both internal and external factors cause examination anxiety among learners in high schools. External among other factors include teachers' factors, less work covered during the course and parental factors. Internal factors include inability to study by students and inadequate preparation by students.

From the findings and the literature, it shows that there are a number of causes of examination anxiety among students in universities. It is therefore important that these causes are identified and taken note of in order for students to be helped to cope with academic demands before, during and after examinations.

On the centrally Katebe (2022) conducted a study to determine the prevalence and determinants of depression, anxiety among university students in higher educational institutions in Zambia. He found that many students are suffering from anxiety basing on mainly other reasons than examinations. However, the findings acknowledge that examination anxiety is just one cause of anxiety among the many causes. Other causes of anxiety include relationship issues, school fees, family issues and other social and economic issues.

In addition, a study among university students by Duraku (2017) reported that both undergraduate students experienced examination anxiety than masters' students. The undergraduate cited lack of preparation, poor time management, lack of study skills and characteristics of the examination and the lecturers. However, masters' students had higher levels of confidence, received good grades and understood the content well prior to examination. The study was done among undergraduate students at Chalimbana University and the findings show that indeed examination anxiety is rampant among undergraduate distance students at Chalimbana University.

The students revealed that there is need for orientation, examination questions to be based on work covered in the module and need to conduct practicals in practical courses. Similarly, Mukolwe, (2015), Chikopela et al. (2019) and Mubonde et al, (2020) recommended that in order to reduce examination anxiety among learners there is need to be involved in guidance and counseling policy strategies which encompass orientation, student choices and teaching overall expectations among students. The strategies are meant to create a conducive learning environment for students. The findings show that there is need to orient students in order for them to understand their expectations. The students need to be oriented on continuous assessment, course content and examination preparation. Students also need to be exposed

to examination questions and past papers questions so that they familiarize themselves with how the questions are set.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the majority of undergraduate distance students experienced anxiety during examination due to less work being covered during residential inadequate preparation for the examination, so many courses to do, and lecturers did not do much to prepare them for the examination. The study established that examination anxiety affected their performance during examination. Above all, the study found that there is need to orient students on courses and examination practices in the university as a way of reducing examination anxiety

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- University management should ensure that students are oriented on examinations, continuous assessment, course contents, course combination, expectations and overall university culture for the students to easily adapt to the university system.
- The anxiety.university management should ensure that students who experience examination anxiety are guided and counselled.
- Lecturers should ensure that examinations questions are set in accordance with the course outline and content in the module to reduce examination anxiety among students.
- Students must ensure that they prepare adequately way before examinations in order for them to reduce on panicking which leads to examination.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Abdullah, R D, Al-Ameri, M H I. (2020). Prevalence of Levels of Examination Anxiety among Undergraduate Students of the Colleges of University of Thi-Qar, Iraq. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, Vol.10, No. 10.
- [2] Shri1, R (2010). Anxiety: Causes and Management. *Journal of Behavioral Sciences*. 2010 vol. 5. No, 100-118.
- [3] Cassady, J. C., & Johnson, R. E. (2002). Cognitive test anxiety and academic performance. In B. A. Faleye (2010). *Cognitive test anxiety and learning outcomes of selected undergraduate students. The African Symposium: An online Journal of the African Educational Research Network*, 10 (2), 345-356
- [4] Vaz, C. J., Pothiyil, T. D., George, L. S., Alex, S., Pothiyil, D., & Kamath, A. (2018). Factors influencing examination anxiety among undergraduate nursing students: An exploratory factor analysis. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, 12(7), 16-19.
- [5] Chaurasiya, K and Gupta, S (2018). A Study of the Examination Anxiety among the Secondary School Students of Gandhinagar in the Context of Some Variables. *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in Multi Languages*. Vol. 6, Issue: 1, January: 2018 (IJRSM) ISSN: 2321 – 2853.
- [6] Ormond, K. (2011). The Prevalence and Effects of Test Anxiety in School Children. *Educational Psychology*, 27(1), 89-101
- [7] Katebe, B. (2022). Prevalence and determinants of depression, anxiety and stress among pre-clinical medical at the Lusaka apex medical university: a cross sectional study. *Lusaka: Apex Medical University*.
- [8] Dawood, E; Ghadeer H L; Mitsu, R; Almutary, N; and Alenezi, B. (2016). Relationship between Test Anxiety and Academic Achievement among Undergraduate Nursing Students. *Journal of Education and Practice*. ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online) Vol.7, No.2, 2016.
- [9] Duraku, Z H. (2017). Factors influencing test anxiety among university students. *The European Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences EJSBS Volume XVIII, Issue I (e-ISSN: 2301-2218)*.
- [10] Mandler, G. & Sarson, S. B. (1952). A study of anxiety and learning. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47, 166-173
- [11] Zeidner M. (1998). *Test anxiety: The state of the art*. New York, NY: Plenum
- [12] Spielberger, C.D., & Vagg, P.R. (1995). Test anxiety: A transactional processmodel. In C.D. Spielberger & P.R. Vagg (Eds.). *Test anxiety: Theory, assessment, and treatment* (pp. 3-14). Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis
- [13] Mukolwe, A N. (2015). Selected correlates of examination anxiety and academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Khwisero Sub-County, Kakamega County, Masters Dissertation, Kenyatta University, Kenya.
- [14] Bentil,J; Donkor, S K; Oti, J A and Adzifome, N S. (2020). Examination anxiety unmasked: predictors and coping strategies as experienced by junior high school students in the Effutu Municipality of Ghana. *International Journal of Education, Learning and Development* Vol.8, No.1, pp.51-65
- [15] Nnorom, S U; Anyanwu, J A and Stephen, E. ( 2020).Causes of Examination Anxiety on the Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Okigwe Zone 1 Imo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, DOI: 10.24940/ijird/2020/v9/i5/MAY20027
- [16] Mohamadia , M ; Alishahib ,Z and Soleimanic, N (2014). A Study on Test Anxiety and Its Relationship to Test Score and Self-actualization of Academic EFL Students in Iran. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 98, 1156 – 1164
- [17] Chikopela R., Mandyata J.M., Ndhlovu D. and Mpolomoka D.L. Counselling HIV and AIDS Learners with Hearing Impairment: Gaps in Practice in Lusaka's Secondary Schools, Zambia, in *European Journal of Special Education Research* Volume 4, Issue 1, 2019 PP 87-105 (online)www.oapub.org/edu ISSN 2501-2428
- [18] Mubonde E., Ndhlovu D., Chikopela R., & Mandyata M. J. Views of Stakeholders on Career Guidance Services Provided to Pupils with Hearing Impairment at Nsonta Secondary School in Kasama District, Zambia. *Zambia Interdisciplinary journal of Education | Volume 1. No. 1. (Pub. 20.11.2020)*