

Examination Phobia among Secondary Level Students

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Abstract

The study was an effort to measure secondary school level students' views about fear of examination. The paper identifies problems and causes of examination phobia (fear of examination) among female students of secondary level. The data for the study was collected from students of secondary level through a questionnaire. The findings of the study reported that fear of examination affects the academic performance of the students in the examination and they could not perform according to their knowledge due to fear of examination as they forget the answers of some questions during examination due to nervousness and fear of examination. A significant number of students answered their mind go blank before start of examination and they could not depict their knowledge on paper due to limited time pressure allowed for paper. The study found out that fear of punishment from parents and fear of annoyance of teachers on poor performance in the examination, tough competition among class fellows for getting good grades, limited time pressure in attempting for examination questions, fear of repeating the same class and poor preparation of examination were the main causes of examination phobia. At the same time it was also identified that students were familiar with the importance of the examinations and they answered that examination provide them chance to depict their abilities of thinking and decision making. Students may be given frequent tests so that they may take examination as routine work. Healthy competitive environment among students, remedy teaching to low achievers, Parents' encouragement for children to better performance in the exams, introduction of internal semester examination system. Examination phobia on male and female students, differences among male and female students regarding examination phobia and the relationship of examination phobia and the achievement of the students may further be investigated.

Keywords: *examination phobia, secondary level*

Introduction

Education is a process through which efforts are made to change the thinking and behaviour of individual in desirable direction. In order to find out how much this objective has been achieved, it is measured through conducting test on students. This process testing is called examination.

“Education is the process of change. It includes all those activities that make an individual to become a useful member of the society. It also provides its services in the transmission of human heritage from one generation to another” (Ahmad, 2007).

Educational system is like a body, which consists of different parts, and all these parts together perform their functions as system. Curriculum, Teacher, Students and examination are its major parts. From ancient times till date examinations have remained a part of the educational system. It is the only source of measuring the abilities of the students. In brief it can be said that educational system is an empty vase without examinations.

“Examination is the process of analysis, identification, and evaluation, interpretation in any type of academic evaluation conducted to measure and assess the students’ academic performance”.

The term Examination cannot be differentiated from Testing. Function of both of these systems is the evaluation and assessment of student’s performance.

“Test is a set of questions, problems or exercises to which the students are asked to respond to obtain an appraisal of designated characteristics of the students such as specific kind of knowledge, aptitude, abilities and skills; in education used interchangeably with examination” (Ahmad, 2001).

Examination plays very vital role in order to assess the abilities of students. Through examination, teachers can also analyzed strengths and weaknesses of students. It is the only tool for the evaluation of different aspects related to teaching learning process. It is a source of inspiration for students to do well in examination and get praise from teacher and parents. Through examinations, the effectiveness of curriculum and performance of teacher can be judged. “Examinations are employed to bring about qualitative improvement in education” (Qureshi, 1996).

Tests are of different types like “Standardized Test” which are on printed form designed for students’ evaluation. Another type of test is “Achievement Test” used to measure how much an individual has learned about a particular subject. This type of test is mostly used at academic level for the assessment of students’ abilities.

The quality of a test can be measured by three major standards (1) Validity: a test measures what it claims to measure, (2) Reliability: it refers to the stability of a measure. A test is considered trustworthy if we get the same result frequently. 3) Practicality. Practicality is concerned with practical use rather than theoretical possibilities. It is the state of being realistic and practicable.

In Pakistan, there are mainly three levels of education. Primary level which is the most important sub-sector of entire education system. It is the foundation stone upon which the large building of the entire social, cultural and economic development of a nation is to be built. According to Collins, English Dictionary primary education is “first is the primary stage that lasts for five years and enrolls the children of 5-9 years”. ‘Primary education comprises classes I to V and enrolls students of age group 5 to 9’ (Akbar, 1998 p. 12).

Examinations are of two types (1) Internal examinations (2) External examinations. Internal examinations are conducted by the institutions on their own responsibility while External examinations are those examinations, which are conducted by any external authority. In Pakistan federal board of intermediate and secondary education Islamabad conducts external examination for secondary and higher secondary level at federal level where as provincial boards of intermediate and secondary education conduct external examination for secondary and higher secondary levels in their respective provinces.

Secondary level is an important sub-sector of the entire educational system. On the one hand, it provides the middle level work force for the economy and on the other hand, it acts as a feeder for the higher level of education. It is a stage where a student enters adolescence. The basic perception and modes of behaviour start taking shape and problem of adjustment with the new roles in life. According to National Education Policy 1998-2010, secondary education is an important sub-sector of the entire educational system. On the other hand, it provides the middle level work force for the economy and on the other hand, it acts as a feeder for the high level of education.

Although examinations are necessary and no educational system can be complete without examination. At the same time it is an admitted fact that some students get fearful of examination. Some fall ill before starting of examination due to fear of examination. For students' fear of examination psychologists use different terms like Examination Phobia, fear of exams, anxiety etc.

Phobia is the fear or anxiety disorder, which causes avoidance and panic. The term is derived from Greek word Phobus, which means 'fear' terror 'panic', but a phobia is more than this since all persons experience fear of terror occasionally. "Fear is a common type of anxiety disorder, intense fear that is characterized by fear of a specific situation or object" (Khalid, 2001)

Phobias are thought to be learned emotional responses. It is generally believed that phobias occur when fear is resulted by an original threatening situation is transmitted to another similar situation. The defining feature of phobia that may require treatment is that it causes frequent, severe and intense anxiety. The term stress refers to the state of disproportion within an individual that is elicited by an actual or perceived difference between environmental demands and the individuals' competence to deal with these demands, and it is manifested through a multiplicity of physiological, anatomical and behavioural responses. This pattern occurs as a result of the individual's extreme contact to environmental demands or stressors. This situation gives rise to maladaptive response patterns commonly exposed through anxiety.

"A phobia is an irrational, intense, persistent fear and anxiety of certain situation, objects and activities" (online reference retrieved on 05-02-2008). Phobias are of different types. Common types of phobias include Anthrophobia (fear of people or being in a company), Ergophobia (fear of work or functioning), and Hydrophobia (fear of water), Decidophobia is the fear of making decisions. An individual suffering from this kind of individual cannot take any kind of decision in difficult situations.

Phobia can be caused by different reasons. According to Mental Health Professionals, phobias are the result of repressed, unconscious conflicts symbolized by the type of phobia in order to control this kind of fear and anxiety. Therapists try to make an individual realize at a very basic emotional level that no real danger exists. "Effective treatment

involves confronting the phobic object or situation in a gradual way, most often with the help of a therapist” (David, 1998).

Many researches have already conducted in the area of the treatment of different kinds of phobias. A research study conducted by Bjorn Helge Johnson and Kenneth Hugdahl(1989) was based on the analysis of different phobias through questionnaires. The study concludes that different fear questionnaires yielded a high degree of reliability and their use in clinical practice is encouraged.

In educational process, although the role of examination is of great importance but some students suffer from fear of examination. According to Tahir (2006), More than 50 percent of students suffer from examination phobia. It does not matter whether the student is intelligent or not. They all are worried about forgetting while appearing in an examination. Don Davies, (1998) says that examination phobia is a major problem for large number of students. For them, the examination is something which is almost inevitable.

There are number of factors, which lead to examination phobia in students at secondary level. Most students fear that examination may cuts down their efficiency and they cannot perform well in examination according to their knowledge and abilities. All the students feel the importance of examination. With that settled, they start focusing on exams while living with a feeling of dread instead of enjoying their classes.

“Fear of examination is viewed as a state having considerable significance for academic performance” (Sylvia, 2005).

Exam phobia is a self damaging factor which negatively affects the students and their performances. The student is unable to give is maximum productivity and the end result would be critical”. (Dr Ruwan M .Jayatunge, 2008).

“Some students experience genuine, deep-rooted problems in examinations. Their mind goes blank, they gets the shakes, their hands go numb and they suffer from any number of sudden disability” (Hall. A, 1975)

Many researches have already been conducted in the area of student’s fear of examination. Keeping in view the situation and the previous studies conducted in the field of examination phobia, provided the researchers a sound ground to conduct a research study in Pakistani scenario.

Theoretical Framework:

The present research follows the theory of Mandler and Sarason (1952). The research demonstrated that the fear of examination invariably resulted in a performance in evaluation situation. According to that theory. "Examination fear is debilitating and the performance of the highly anxious person is lowered in the examination situation. The anxious individual worries during examinations, and may even engage in daydreaming to some extent. As a result concentration can be seriously affected." (Mandler and Sarason, 1953).

Statement of the Problem

The problem under investigation was to find out the problems of Examination phobia among students of Secondary School level in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- a) To investigate the problems faced by students at secondary level due to fear of examination.
- b) To measure causes relating to fear of examination in students at secondary level.

Null Hypothesis

1. There is no problem faced by students at secondary level due to fear of examination.
2. There are no causes related to the fear of examination in students at secondary level.

Delimitation of the Study

Keeping in view the time and financial constraints, the study was delimited to;

- a. to the female students of secondary schools of public sectors located in Islamabad city.
- b. Sample for the study was selected from Islamabad Model College for Girls F-7/4 Islamabad.
- c. Teachers teaching grade 10th students at Islamabad Model College for Girls F-7/4 Islamabad.
- d. It was further delimited just to check students' views about examination phobia/ fear of examination.

Method and Procedure

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the problem of examination phobia among students of secondary level. The study was descriptive in nature. The population of the study included all female students studying at secondary level and all teachers teaching at secondary level in Girls Model Colleges of Islamabad. The sample for the study was selected randomly from Islamabad Model College for Girls F-7/4 Islamabad. One hundred (100) students of grade 10 were selected randomly. Twenty (20) teachers teaching 10 grade were selected randomly.

Data Instruments

The researcher developed a questionnaire for students regarding the Examination Phobia in female students at Secondary level for data collection. A team of experts from the National University of Modern Languages of Islamabad checked the validity of the instrument. After the validation by experts, the instrument was administered on the subjects.

Data Analysis, Findings and Conclusions

The data was collected through questioners and analyzed by applying chi-square test.

Response of students regarding the effect of examination phobia/ fear of examination on performance.

TABLE: 1. Fear of examination affects the performance of students

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Fear of examination affects my performance.	fo	15	12	56	17
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-35	-38	6	-33
		(Fo-fe) ²	1225	1444	36	1089
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	24.5	28.9	0.72	21.8
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 75.92$				

Table No.1 reflects that the calculated value of X^2 75.92 found to and it is greater than the tabulated value 7.82, hence the null hypothesis that “fear of examination does not affect my performance” is rejected and it was found that students had fear of examination.

Response of students about the view that nervousness while taking an examination helps to do better

TABLE: 2. Nervousness helps students to perform better

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
2	Nervousness while taking an examination helps me to do better.	fo	38	21	4	37
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-12	-29	-46	-13
		(Fo-fe) ²	144	841	2116	169
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	2.9	16.8	42.3	3.4
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 65.4$				

Significant*

df = 3

Level of significance = 0.05

Table No. 2 explains that the calculated value of X^2 65.4 found and it is greater than the tabulated value 7.82, hence the null hypothesis that “Nervousness while taking an examination does not help me to perform better” is rejected. It was found that due to nervousness of examination phobia students perform less than their knowledge.

Response of students regarding nervousness before taking an examination

TABLE No. 3: Students always feel nervousness before taking an examination

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
3	I am always nervous before taking an examination.	fo	48	12	26	14
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-2	-38	-24	-36
		(Fo-fe) ²	4	1444	576	1296
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	0.08	28.9	11.5	25.9
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 66.3$				

Significant* df = 3 Level of significance= 0.05

Table No.3 explores that the calculated value of X² is 66.3 greater than the tabulated value 7.82 hence, the null hypothesis that “I do not feel nervous before taking an examination” is rejected and it was found that students are nervous before taking an examination.

Response of students regarding effects of poor preparation of examination on students

TABLE No.4: Poor preparation of an examination gets students upset

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
4	When I am poorly prepared for an examination, I get upset.	Fo	52	18	17	13
		Fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	2	-32	-33	-37
		(Fo-fe) ²	4	1024	1089	1369
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	0.08	20.5	21.8	27.3
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 69.7$				

Significant* df = 3 Level of significance = 0.05

Table No.4 shows that the calculated value of X² 69.7 found and it is greater than the tabulated value 7.82, hence the statement “When I am poorly prepared for an examination, I do not get upset” is rejected. It was clear that students who did not get preparation were afraid of examination.

Response of students regarding the affect of limited time for attempting examination questions which cause them to perform worst

that “students do not have fear of punishment by their parents” is rejected. It was find out that students have fear of punishment for performing not well in the examination.

Response of students regarding teachers’ annoyance on getting low marks

Table No.11: Students have fear of examination due to teacher’s annoyance on getting low grades.

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
11	Students have fear that teachers would be annoyed with them on getting low grades.	fo	41	18	27	14
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-9	-32	-23	-36
		(Fo-fe) ²	81	1024	529	1296
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	1.6	20.5	10.6	25.9
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 58.6$				

Significant* df = 3 Level of significance = 0.05

Table No.17 shows that the calculated value of X² found to be 58.6 and it is greater than the tabulated value 7.82 hence, the statement that “I do not have fear that teachers will be annoyed with me on getting low grades” is rejected. It was depicted that students had fear of annoyance from their teachers for getting low marks.

Response of students on fear of being retain in the same class on failing

Table: No.12: Students feel examination phobia due to fear of being retain in the same class On failing.

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent			Sometimes	Never
			Always	Often		
12	Fear of being retain in the same class on failing, cause fear of examination.	fo	37	16	25	22
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-13	-34	-25	-28
		(Fo-fe) ²	169	1156	625	784
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	3.4	23.1	12.5	15.7
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 54.7$				

Significant* df = 3 Level of significance = 0.05

Table No.12 explains that the calculated value of X² found to be 54.7 and it is greater than the tabulated value 7.82 hence, the null hypothesis that “Fear of being retain in the same class do not cause fear of examination” is rejected. So the fear of retaining in the same class was a cause of fear of exams.

Response of students regarding fear of examination due to tough competition among class fellows

Table No. 13: In examination, tough competition among class fellows cause fear of Examination

Sr. No	Statement	Respondent			Sometimes	Never
			Always	Often		
13	In examination, tough competition among class fellows causes fear of examination.	fo	47	19	20	14
		fe	50	50	50	50
		Fo-fe	-3	-31	-30	-36
		(Fo-fe) ²	9	961	900	1296
		(fo-fe) ² /fe	0.2	19.2	18	25.9
		$\sum(fo-fe)^2/fe = X^2 = 63.3$				

Significant* df = 3 Level of significance = 0.05

students regarding examination phobia and the relationship of examination phobia and the achievement of the students may be investigated.

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