

Learned Helplessness And Self-Efficacy As Correlates Of Examination Phobia Among Secondary School Students In Obio-Akpor L.G.Ariversstate.

Dr. Opara, Ijeoma Margaret & Nwanze, Rita Chinenye

Department Of Educational Psychology Guidance And Counselling, University Of Port Harcourt.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Opara

Abstract: The study investigated learned helplessness and self-efficacy as predictors of examination phobia among secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers state, Nigeria. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational design. A sample of 241 senior secondary two (SS2) examophobic students was drawn from the population of 609 senior secondary two (SS2) examophobic students through stratified random and purposive sampling techniques. The three instruments used for data collection were: Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS), Self Efficacy Scale (SES) and Examination Phobia Scale (EPS). The three instruments, LHS, SES and EPS were validated by experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliabilities of the three instruments (LHS, SES and EPS) were determined through Cronbach Alpha technique and the reliability coefficients were 0.85, 0.84 and 0.93 respectively. Data collected were analyzed using multiple regression analysis to answer the research questions while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test associated with the regression were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. The results revealed that learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly significantly predicted examination phobia. Independently, learned helplessness, also significantly predicted examination phobia while self-efficacy had no significant prediction on examination phobia. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, among which is that guidance counselors should be employed in all the public secondary schools in order to assist students with problems of learned helplessness and self-efficacy in an effort to curb examination phobia.

Keywords: Learned helplessness, self-efficacy and examination phobia.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Examination phobia is anxiety disorder that is common among students. It is described as irrational, overwhelming, excessive and uncontrollable fear or dislike for examinations. It also denotes unnecessary fear of examinations, over thinking about examinations that makes one gets nervous (Dewan, 2017).

However, it can be normal for one to get nervous before, during or after examinations. Experiencing fear can be a positive thing, as it can motivate one to work harder. While phobia on the other hand, is amplified terror that has a negative impact on one's life. Phobia has been described in Nwankwo (2015), as excessive and irrational fear or dread of objects or situations which should not normally evoke fear because they present no actual danger to the person. However, a minimum level of anxiety or fear is necessary for anybody to work extra ordinarily. But on the other hand, extreme fear or anxiety can have negative effects on students and may erase their memories even if they are well prepared for exam. Examination phobia increases anxiety and reduces performance. As a result one cannot achieve the desired results. When it is at highest point, the student may be so much scared of exams and may likely find ways to avoid them.

Personal experience has shown that many students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area are affected with the problem of examination phobia. It has been observed that many students have perceived examination as a source of worry and anxiety in the Local Government Area and this seems to be related to some other psychological factors, such as self-efficacy and learned helplessness. This has not been established in this L.G.A. thus necessitating the study on learned helplessness and self-efficacy as predictors of examination phobia.

The place of learned helplessness is very crucial in understanding the problem of examination phobia. Learned helplessness has been defined by Schultz & Schultz (2005) as the feeling of powerlessness or helplessness arising from inability to control one's environment a condition resulting from the perception that we have no control over our environment. Cherry (2014), defined learned helplessness as a mental state in which an organism is forced to endure an aversive stimuli or stimuli that are painful or otherwise unpleasant, become

unable or unwilling to avoid subsequent encounter with those stimuli, even if they are escapable, presumably because it has learned that it cannot control the situation. When this feeling of powerlessness or lack of control, continue to occur in respect to any adverse environment, despite one's effort to achieve success in that particular task, one's brain may learn to be helpless in that particular situation or event. Thus when confronted with similar situation or task in future, one may give up hope and effort in achieving success (Eke & Nwanze, 2015). Learned helplessness can be described as a condition in which a person suffers from a feeling of powerlessness arising from a traumatic event or persistent failure to succeed in a particular task. The problem of learned helplessness is found in many facets of life including academics, business, politics, relationships and employment. When students experience learned helplessness in academics, they tend to avoid learning, even if they do, they are likely to perform poorly.

On the other hand, self-efficacy also seems to relate to students' experience of examination phobia. The strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals can greatly affect one's achievements including academics. Self-efficacy therefore is seen as the belief in one's capabilities to achieve a goal or an outcome. Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. These students will put forth high degree of effort in order to meet their commitments, and attribute failure to things which are in their control, rather than blaming external factors. Thus students with low self-efficacy have low aspirations which may result in disappointing academic performances, becoming part of a self-fulfilling feedback cycle (Margolis and McCabe, 2006).

Eccles & Wigfield (2002) defined self-efficacy as an individual confidence in his or her ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task. Cherry (2017), described self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. This implies that one's sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches challenges, goals and tasks including examination. Self-efficacy is the confidence in one's ability to achieve intended results. Albert Bandura, in Cherry (2017), defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. One's sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks and challenges. Self-efficacy can influence your goals, actions, successes and failures in life. If one's self-efficacy in an area is much lower than one's ability, one will never challenge oneself or improve. If one's self-efficacy is higher than one's ability, one will set goals that are too high, fail and quit. The ideal self-efficacy is one that is slightly above a person's ability, high enough to be challenging while still being likely realistic.

However, high self-efficacy is required for a student to perform well in academics, where it is low, it may likely lead to fear of examination (examination phobia). Students with the problem of learned helplessness and poor self-efficacy may likely experience test anxiety and this consequently may lead to poor academic performance.

Therefore, there is need to investigate the extent of the prediction of learned helplessness and self-efficacy on examination phobia. Examination phobia or examophobia is a common problem that affects most students all over the world, despite being intelligent or hard-working. It is associated with inability to recall answers, unable to write fast and also being completely blank during examinations.

Examophobics, apart from performing poorly in exams, they also pass through some other psychological problems such as loss of confidence and low self-esteem. They also tend to suffer from severe stress, inability to concentrate, sudden amnesia and even depression. Personal experience has shown that many students are running away from exams. They tend to avoid writing examinations by different means such as by pretending to be sick during examinations, giving all sort of excuses for not writing examinations, coming late and even not coming to school at all during examination periods. Personal experience also has dictated that most students, even when they manage to write examinations, they do not do well due to examination phobia. All these consequently have affected learning and academic achievement negatively among students in secondary schools in Obio-Akpor L.G.A. In addition to these, students who experience examination phobia sometimes exhibit learned helplessness and self-efficacy but the extent to which learned helplessness and self-efficacy can predict examination phobia in a student is not certain. A question then arises – how do learned helplessness and self-efficacy predict examination phobia among secondary school students in Obio-Akpor L.G.A.? The need to clear this uncertainty spurred the conduct of this research.

The aim of the study was to find out the extent learned helplessness and self-efficacy predict examination phobia among secondary school students in Obio-Akpor L.G.A. Specifically, the following objectives were achieved:

1. Determine the extent to which learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly predict examination phobia among secondary school students.
2. Find out the extent to which learned helplessness and self-efficacy independently predict examination phobia among secondary school students

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do learned helplessness and self- efficacy jointly predict examination phobia among secondary school students?

2. To what extent do learned helplessness and self -efficacy independently predicts examination phobia among secondary school students?

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance, were formulated and guided this study:

1. Learned helplessness and self- efficacy jointly, do not

significantly predict examination phobia among secondary school students.

2. Learned helplessness and self-efficacy independently do not significantly predict examination phobia among secondary school students

The benefits derivable from the study are quite numerous. It will have great impact on the students, especially those with examination phobia, helping them to overcome their problems.

Secondly, it will also provide insight to guidance and counselors, in handling students with problem of examination phobia. Finally, the study will serve as source of literature to other researchers, carrying out similar research.

II. METHOD

The study adopted correlational design. The population of the study comprises 609 senior secondary two (SS2) students with examination phobia, in the 14 public secondary schools in Obio-Akpor L.G.A. A sample size of 241 senior secondary two (SS2) students was used for the study. This sample size was obtained via simple random, stratified random and purposive sampling techniques.

Three instruments were used for the study, namely Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS), Self- Efficacy Scale (SES) and Examination Phobia Scale (EPS). The Learned Helplessness Scale is an instrument adapted from the work of Quinless and Nelson (1988) with 20 items. The second instrument tagged Self-Efficacy Scale is an instrument with 10 items, adapted from the work of Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) while the third instrument tagged Examination Phobia Scale is an instrument with 10 items, adapted from the work of Driscoll (2004). These instruments were used to collect data on learned helplessness, self-efficacy and examination phobia respectively. The face and content validities of the instruments were also obtained by presenting the instruments to three experts in measurement and evaluation in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt, to indicate whether the instruments measure what they are supposed to measure, check for item ambiguity, and state whether the content coverage was adequate. After modifications by the experts, the instruments were confirmed to have both face and content validities.

The reliability of the instruments were determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability technique on a sample of 20 students with examination phobia, who were not part of the main study. The coefficient values obtained were: learned helplessness 0.85, self -efficacy 0.84 and examination phobia 0.93. These values obtained were high enough to guarantee the use of the instruments for the study. In analysis of data collected, the research questions were answered using multiple regression while the corresponding null hypotheses were also tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test associated with the regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

III. RESULTS

The results were presented according to research questions and hypotheses. In order to answer research question 1 and test hypothesis 1, data collected were used to determine the extent learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly predict examination phobia among secondary school students. To achieve this, multiple regression analysis was employed to answer the research question while analysis of variance (ANOVA) associated with the regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis.

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of the joint relationship between learned helplessness, self-efficacy and examination phobia.

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
	0.705	0.498	0.493	5.98470

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)					
	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	8445.974	2	4222.987	117.906	0.00
Residual	8524.358	238	35.817		
Total	16970.332	240			

Dependent variable: Examination Phobia
 Predictor variables: Learned helplessness and Self-Efficacy.

The result in table 1 revealed the multiple regression analysis of the joint prediction of learned helplessness, self-efficacy and examination phobia. The multiple regression coefficient obtained is 0.705, the value of R² is 0.498 while the adjusted coefficient of R² obtained is 0.493. This means that the two independent variables (learned helplessness and self-efficacy) jointly had low positive prediction on examination phobia. Based on the R² value of 0.498, indicates that the joint prediction of the two independent variables only explain 49.8% of the variations in examination phobia while of students can be explained by learned helplessness and self-efficacy while the remaining 50.2% may be due to other factors outside the scope of the study.

To determine if the prediction is significant or not, analysis of variance (ANOVA) associated with multiple regression was employed. The calculated F value of 117.906 was significant at 0.000 level, which is lower than the chosen level of probability of 0.05, hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly significantly predict examination phobia among secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers state.

In order to answer research question 2 and test the null hypothesis 2, data collected were used to determine the extent learned helplessness and self-efficacy independently predicts examination phobia among secondary school students. To achieve this, the beta value and t-test associated with the regression analysis were employed.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis of the relative contribution of each of the independent variables on examination phobia

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
(constant)		17.087	2.160	7.909	0.000
Learned-Helplessness	0.594	0.040	0.695	14.910	0.000
Self-efficacy	-0.050	0.048	-0.049	-1.051	0.295

Dependent variable: Examination Phobia
 The results in table 2 revealed that the beta value for learned helplessness and self-efficacy are 0.695 and -0.049 respectively. In view of this, learned helplessness had a high positive prediction on examination phobia while self-efficacy had a low negative prediction on examination phobia. When the Beta values were tested for significance, it was observed that the associated t-value for learned helplessness was 14.910, significant at 0.000 which is less than the chosen level of probability (0.05). Therefore the null hypothesis of “no significant prediction of learned helplessness on examination phobia was rejected. This shows actually that learned helplessness significantly predicts examination phobia. Also the associated t-value for self-efficacy was -1.051, significant at 0.295, which is greater than the chosen level of probability (0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis of “self-efficacy do not significantly predict examination phobia” was accepted. This implies statistically that, self-efficacy does not have a significant prediction on examination phobia.

The findings of the study were summarized as follows:

- Learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly, significantly predict examination phobia.
- Independently, learned helplessness significantly predict examination phobia while self-efficacy did not significantly predict examination phobia.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings of this study was based on the results of the research questions stated and the null hypotheses formulated and tested. For joint prediction of learned helplessness and self-efficacy on examination phobia, result obtained indicated that learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly, had a positive significant prediction on examination phobia. This finding is in agreement with the findings made by Manije and Khorvash (2016), on predicting examination anxiety according to personality features and self-efficacy among female students at Islamic Azad University, Khomeinishahr branch. A sample of 256 students was used. The result indicated that adaptability and self-efficacy can predict examination anxiety of female students ($p > 0.05$). The conformity in the findings could be as a result of testing with similar statistical tool – multiple regression statistics, irrespective of the area of the study.

For relationship between learned helplessness and examination phobia, the result obtained indicated that learned helplessness independently also had a positive significant prediction on examination phobia. This finding is not in line with the findings made by Raufelder, Regner & Woods (2017), on test anxiety and learned helplessness, moderated by students' perception of teacher's motivational support, which revealed that worry was negatively associated with helplessness in school. This finding is also not in agreement with the study conducted by Akca (2011), on the relationship between test anxiety and learned helplessness levels of students preparing for Turkish High School placement test and University entrance examination, conducted in Aksary province in Turkey, with a sample of 708 students. The findings of the study indicated no significant difference between level of test anxiety and learned helplessness. The difference in findings could be as a result of difference in sample size, location or other factors outside the scope of this study.

Concerning the relationship between self-efficacy and examination phobia, results obtained indicated that self-efficacy negatively predict examination phobia and statistical testing indicated no significant prediction on examination phobia. This finding is in agreement with the findings made by Cubukcu (2008), on the correlation between self-efficacy and foreign language learning anxiety, with a sample of 100 students in junior level from English teacher training program at a University in Turkey. The findings indicated both are uncorrelated and gender plays no important role. The similarity in findings could be as a result of using similar statistical tool for data analysis.

However, this finding contradicts the finding made by Yue (1996), where he examined the level of anxiety and its relationship with self-efficacy, which indicated that self-efficacy was a salient and powerful indicator of test anxiety. The difference in findings could be as a result of differences in culture or statistical tool used in analysis of data.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have indicated that learned helplessness and self-efficacy jointly, have significant prediction on examination phobia. Therefore the issue of learned helplessness and the role of self-efficacy in curbing the problem of examination phobia should be addressed in order to increase academic achievement.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Guidance counselors should be employed in public secondary schools in Obio-Akpor, to assist students with the problems of learned helplessness and self-efficacy in order to curb problem of examination phobia among students.
2. Students, especially those who experience learned helplessness in academics should be counselled to build positive sense of control and avoid giving up attitude, and also encouraged to build high and positive self-efficacy, in order to avoid examination phobia and increase academic performance.

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