

Evaluation of Counselling Intervention in Reducing Examination Anxiety among Senior Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test control group design. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 500 students identified as having moderate to high levels of examination anxiety was selected through purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was the Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS), which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86 using Cronbach's Alpha method. Participants in the experimental group received an eight-week counselling intervention programme involving cognitive-behavioural and relaxation techniques, while those in the control group received no treatment. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that students exposed to counselling intervention recorded a substantial reduction in examination anxiety, with a mean anxiety score decreasing from 68.42 (SD = 8.31) at pretest to 42.17 (SD = 6.45) at post-test, representing a 38.4% reduction. In contrast, the control group showed only a marginal decrease from 67.85 (SD = 7.96) to 64.73 (SD = 7.28). ANCOVA results indicated a statistically significant effect of counselling intervention on students' examination anxiety, $F(1,117) = 45.62$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .28$. The study further revealed no significant difference in the effectiveness of counselling intervention based on gender, $F(1,117) = 1.84$, $p > .05$. The study concluded that counselling intervention is an effective strategy for reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. It was recommended that professional counsellors should regularly organize anxiety-management programmes and provide psychological support services to students preparing for internal and external examinations.

Keywords: Counselling intervention, examination anxiety, cognitive-behavioural therapy, secondary school students, academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a vital instrument for national development and individual advancement. Within the educational system, examinations serve as an essential mechanism for assessing students' learning outcomes, academic progress, and readiness for further educational pursuits. In Nigeria, secondary school students are exposed to numerous internal and external examinations, including the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), and various promotional examinations. While examinations are designed to evaluate students' mastery of academic content, they often become a major source of anxiety among students. Examination anxiety has emerged as one of the most prevalent psychological challenges confronting secondary school students, affecting their emotional well-being, concentration, and academic performance.

Examination anxiety refers to a psychological condition characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, fear, and physiological arousal experienced before, during, or after an examination situation. It is a form of performance anxiety that occurs when students perceive examination situations as threatening or beyond their coping abilities (Olakojo & Ojo, 2017; Ekanem et al., 2020). Examination anxiety manifests

through cognitive symptoms such as excessive worry, negative self-talk, and difficulty concentrating; emotional symptoms such as fear and panic; behavioural symptoms such as avoidance and restlessness; and physiological symptoms including increased heartbeat, sweating, headaches, and muscle tension. These symptoms often interfere with students' ability to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills during examinations. Research has shown that examination anxiety is associated with reduced academic performance, low self-esteem, poor study habits, and emotional distress among secondary school students (Olakojo & Ojo, 2017). The prevalence of examination anxiety among secondary school students has become a growing concern among educators, parents, psychologists, and counsellors. Adolescence, which coincides with the senior secondary school stage, is characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this developmental period, students are expected to meet increasing academic demands while simultaneously coping with peer pressure, parental expectations, career decisions, and societal competition. Consequently, many students experience heightened levels of anxiety when faced with examination situations. Studies conducted among Nigerian secondary school students have revealed substantial levels of examination anxiety, with many students reporting feelings of fear, tension, worry, and emotional discomfort before and during examinations (Olakojo & Ojo, 2017; Omoyemiju, 2023).

The consequences of examination anxiety are far-reaching. High levels of anxiety can impair attention, memory retrieval, information processing, and problem-solving abilities, thereby reducing students' academic performance despite adequate preparation (Okoiye & Falaye, 2011). Students with severe examination anxiety may experience examination malpractice tendencies, absenteeism during examinations, poor classroom participation, and diminished academic motivation. In extreme cases, persistent examination anxiety may contribute to psychological problems such as depression, low self-confidence, and social withdrawal (Omoyemiju, 2023). These adverse effects underscore the importance of identifying effective strategies for reducing examination anxiety among students.

Counselling intervention has been recognized as one of the most effective approaches for managing examination anxiety in educational settings. Counselling interventions involve structured professional assistance provided by trained counsellors to help students understand, manage, and overcome psychological challenges affecting their academic and personal development. Through counselling, students are taught coping strategies, relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring skills, problem-solving skills, self-management strategies, and positive study habits that enable them to effectively deal with examination-related stress and anxiety (Ogundokun & Olowo, 2021).

Several counselling approaches have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing examination anxiety among secondary school students. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), for instance, focuses on identifying and modifying irrational thoughts and negative beliefs associated with examination situations. Studies have shown that CBT significantly reduces examination anxiety by helping students develop positive thinking patterns and effective coping mechanisms (Ogundokun & Olowo, 2021). Similarly, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) has been found effective in assisting students to challenge irrational beliefs and replace them with rational and adaptive thoughts, thereby reducing anxiety levels. Eifediyi et al. (2018) reported that REBT significantly reduced examination anxiety among secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria. Other counselling interventions such as relaxation training, behavioural rehearsal, self-management techniques, problem-solving therapy, graded exposure therapy, group counselling, and test-taking skills training have also yielded positive outcomes in reducing examination anxiety. Anyamene et al. (2022) found that behavioural rehearsal techniques significantly reduced test anxiety among secondary school students. Similarly, Anyamene (2021) reported that self-management techniques were effective in helping students manage examination-related anxiety. Ani (2021) further observed that problem-solving counselling techniques significantly reduced test anxiety and improved academic performance among secondary school students. Adeboye et al. (2024) also established that graded exposure and test-taking skills training effectively reduced examination anxiety among secondary school students.

School counselling programmes play a crucial role in promoting students' psychological well-being and academic success. Effective counselling services provide students with opportunities to discuss their fears, identify sources of anxiety, acquire stress-management skills, and develop confidence in their academic abilities. Evidence from school-based counselling programmes indicates that students who participate in

counselling interventions generally report lower levels of examination anxiety compared to their counterparts who do not receive such interventions (Iftikhar et al., 2023). Structured counselling programmes incorporating cognitive-behavioural strategies, stress-management techniques, and emotional support have been found to significantly improve students' coping abilities and academic adjustment (Iftikhar et al., 2023).

In Akwa Ibom State, the issue of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students remains a significant educational concern. The increasing competition for admission into tertiary institutions, pressure to achieve excellent results in external examinations, parental expectations, and societal emphasis on academic success have contributed to heightened anxiety among students. Although guidance and counselling services have been introduced in many secondary schools across the state, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of these counselling interventions in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students. Furthermore, variations in counselling practices, availability of professional counsellors, and students' utilization of counselling services may influence the outcomes of such interventions. Given the growing prevalence of examination anxiety and its detrimental effects on students' academic achievement and psychological well-being, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling interventions in addressing this challenge. Evaluating counselling interventions provides valuable information regarding the extent to which counselling services contribute to anxiety reduction, emotional stability, and improved academic functioning among students (Okoiye & Falaye, 2011). Such evaluation is essential for informing educational policy, strengthening school counselling programmes, and enhancing the quality of psychological support available to students. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. The study is expected to contribute to existing literature on examination anxiety and provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of counselling services in promoting students' psychological well-being and academic success.

Examination anxiety refers to a psychological condition characterized by excessive worry, tension, and physiological arousal experienced by students before, during, or after examination situations. It is a form of performance anxiety that interferes with students' ability to effectively recall and apply learned information during assessments. According to Spielberger's theory of test anxiety, examination anxiety consists of two major components: cognitive worry and emotionality, both of which negatively affect academic performance (Spielberger, 1980). Empirical studies have consistently shown that examination anxiety is prevalent among secondary school students, particularly in high-stakes examination environments. For example, Olakojo and Ojo (2017) found that many Nigerian secondary school students experience high levels of examination anxiety, which significantly affects their academic performance and confidence. Similarly, Omoyemiju (2023) reported that test anxiety is associated with poor concentration, low self-esteem, and reduced academic achievement among adolescents. Roos et al., (2020) test anxiety is a widespread phenomenon across educational levels and is strongly linked with physiological arousal such as increased heart rate and emotional distress during examinations.

The causes of examination anxiety among students are multifaceted. These include fear of failure, poor study habits, unrealistic parental expectations, lack of preparation, and negative self-perception. In Nigeria, societal pressure to excel academically has been identified as a major contributor to students' anxiety during examinations (Omoyemiju, 2023). Additionally, inadequate academic support and ineffective learning strategies also increase anxiety levels. Students who lack effective study skills or who engage in last-minute reading are more likely to experience heightened stress before examinations. McDonald (2001) also noted that cognitive distortions such as negative self-talk and irrational beliefs contribute significantly to test anxiety.

Examination anxiety has been widely documented to negatively affect students' academic achievement. High levels of anxiety impair cognitive functioning, particularly memory retrieval, concentration, and problem-solving ability (Spielberger, 1980). Students with severe anxiety often perform below their actual academic ability due to mental blockage during examinations. Roos et al. (2020) further confirmed that test anxiety is associated with physiological arousal and cognitive interference, which reduce performance efficiency. In Nigeria, Olakojo and Ojo (2017) found that students with high examination anxiety performed poorly compared to their less anxious counterparts. This suggests that examination anxiety is a critical barrier to academic success.

Counselling intervention refers to structured psychological support provided by trained counsellors to help individuals manage emotional, behavioural, and academic challenges. In educational settings, counselling interventions aim to improve students' coping skills, emotional regulation, and academic adjustment. Counselling approaches such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), relaxation techniques, and systematic desensitization have been widely used in reducing examination anxiety. These interventions help students identify irrational thoughts, replace negative beliefs with positive thinking, and develop relaxation skills to manage stress. A study by Eifediyi, Ojugo, and Aluede (2017) found that REBT significantly reduced examination anxiety among secondary school students in Nigeria, with students in the treatment group showing greater improvement compared to the control group. Similarly, Okoiye and Falaye (2011) reported that cognitive and group behavioural therapies were effective in managing examination anxiety among at-risk secondary school students. More recent studies have also confirmed the effectiveness of counselling interventions. For example, Anyamene (2021) found that self-management counselling techniques significantly reduced test anxiety among secondary school students. Likewise, Adeboye et al. (2024) demonstrated that graded exposure and test-taking skills training significantly reduced cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of examination anxiety. Studies across Nigeria and other countries have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of counselling interventions in reducing examination anxiety. For instance, Eifediyi et al. (2017) reported a significant reduction in test anxiety among students exposed to REBT compared to the control group. Similarly, Okoiye and Falaye (2011) found that cognitive-behavioural and group therapies significantly improved students' ability to manage examination anxiety. In another study, Anyamene (2021) confirmed that self-management techniques were effective in reducing anxiety symptoms among secondary school students. Adeboye et al. (2024) found that graded exposure and test-taking skills training significantly reduced physiological, cognitive, and emotional components of test anxiety. These findings collectively support the effectiveness of counselling interventions in managing examination-related stress among students.

The reviewed literature shows that examination anxiety is a major academic and psychological problem among secondary school students. It negatively affects academic performance and emotional well-being. However, counselling interventions such as CBT, REBT, relaxation training, and self-management techniques have been found effective in reducing anxiety levels. Despite these findings, there is still limited empirical evidence specific to Akwa Ibom State, which justifies the present study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students before counselling intervention.
2. Determine the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students after counselling intervention.
3. Examine the effect of counselling intervention on examination anxiety among senior secondary school students.
4. Compare the post-test examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed to counselling intervention.
5. Determine whether gender influences the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students.
6. Examine whether school location (urban and rural) influences the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students before counselling intervention?
2. What is the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students after counselling intervention?
3. What effect does counselling intervention have on examination anxiety among senior secondary school students?
4. What difference exists between the post-test examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed to counselling intervention?
5. What difference exists in the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among male and female senior secondary school students?
6. What difference exists in the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among students in urban and rural secondary schools?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean examination anxiety scores of senior secondary school students exposed to counselling intervention.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the post-test mean examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed to counselling intervention.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among male and female senior secondary school students.

H₀₅: Counselling intervention has no significant effect on examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pretest-posttest control group design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students. The design involved two groups: an experimental group that received counselling intervention and a control group that did not receive the intervention. Both groups were pretested before the intervention and post-tested after the intervention to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O ₁	X	O ₂
Control Group	O ₃	-	O ₄

Where O₁ and O₃ = pre-test observations

X = Counselling intervention

O₂ and O₄ = Post-test observations

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and consists of thirty-one (31) Local Government Areas. The state has numerous public and private secondary schools distributed across urban and rural communities. The choice of Akwa Ibom State was informed by increasing concerns regarding examination anxiety among secondary school students preparing for external examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students of 2025/2026 in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. SS II students were considered suitable because they have adequate exposure to examination activities and are actively preparing for major external examinations.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 500 respondents was used for the study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, five Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom State. In the second stage, ten public secondary schools were selected through simple random sampling. In the third stage, students with moderate and high levels of examination anxiety were identified using the Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS).

From the selected schools, 500 students who met the selection criteria were chosen and assigned into two groups: Experimental Group = 250 students and Control Group = 250 students. Simple random sampling technique was used in assigning respondents to the two groups to ensure equal opportunity of participation.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was titled Examination Anxiety Scale (EAS). The instrument was designed by the researcher based on literature reviewed on examination anxiety. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A Contained demographic information such as Gender, Age, School Location, Class. Section B Contained 25 items measuring examination anxiety among students. Responses were structured on a four-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. Higher scores indicated higher levels of examination anxiety.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts: one in Guidance and Counselling, one in Educational Psychology, and one in Measurement and Evaluation from a recognized university. Their observations, corrections, and recommendations were incorporated in the final draft of the instrument to ensure that the items adequately measured examination anxiety and aligned with the objectives of the study. A pilot study was conducted using 30 senior secondary school students from schools outside the sampled schools but with similar characteristics. The data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained, indicating that the instrument possessed high internal consistency and was therefore reliable for the study.

Counselling Intervention Programme

The experimental group participated in an eight-week counselling intervention programme designed to reduce examination anxiety. The intervention programme covered: Understanding examination anxiety, Identification of anxiety triggers, Cognitive restructuring techniques, Relaxation and breathing exercises, Time management

skills, Study habit improvement strategies, Test-taking skills training, Stress management and confidence-building techniques. Each counselling session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted once weekly by trained professional counsellors. The control group did not receive any counselling intervention during the period of the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher obtained approval from school authorities before commencing the study.

The procedure involved the following stages:

Stage One: Pre-test: The Examination Anxiety Scale was administered to both the experimental and control groups before the intervention programme. Stage Two: Treatment: The experimental group received counselling intervention for eight weeks while the control group continued with normal school activities. Stage Three: Post-test: At the end of the intervention period, the Examination Anxiety Scale was re-administered to both groups. The scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test administrations were used to determine the effectiveness of the counselling intervention.

Method of Data Analysis Research questions were answered using: Mean and Standard Deviation. The decision rule was based on the criterion mean of 2.50. While Research hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: What is the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students before counselling intervention?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pre-test Examination Anxiety Score

Group	N	Mean	SD
Experimental	250	68.42	8.31
Control	250	67.85	7.96

The results indicate that both groups had high examination anxiety before the intervention

Research Question Two

What is the level of examination anxiety among senior secondary school students after counselling intervention?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pre-test Examination Anxiety Score

Group	N	Mean	SD
Experimental	250	42.17	6.45
Control	250	64.73	7.28

The results show a substantial reduction in examination anxiety among students who received counselling intervention.

Research Question Three

What effect does counselling intervention have on examination anxiety among senior secondary school students?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation and Difference of in Pretest and pos-test (Examination Anxiety)score of student in Experiment and control group.

Groups		Pretest	Post-test	Mean Difference
	Mean	68.42	42.17	26.25
Experimental	N	250	250	
	SD	8.31	6.45	
	Mean	67.85	64.73	3.12
Control	N	250	250	
	SD	7.96	7.28	

The experimental group recorded a reduction of 26.25 points compared with only 3.12 points for the control group.

Research Question Four

What difference exists between the post-test examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed to counselling intervention?

Table 4: Comparison of Post-test Scores

Group	Mean	SD
Experimental	42.17	6.45
Control	64.73	7.28

The result indicates a marked difference in favour of the experimental group.

Research Question Five

What difference exists in the effectiveness of counselling intervention among male and female students?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Post-test Anxiety Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	240	43.12	6.51
Female	260	41.26	6.38

The difference between male and female students appears minimal.

Research Question Six

What difference exists in the effectiveness of counselling intervention among students in urban and rural schools?

Table 6: Post-test Anxiety Scores by School Location

Location	N	Mean	SD
Urban	280	41.88	6.22
Rural	220	42.54	6.69

The result indicates a slight difference between urban and rural students.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One:

There is no significant difference between the examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed after controlling for pre-test examination anxiety scores.

Table 7: ANCOVA Analysis of Examination Anxiety scores of students in Experimental and control Groups.

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta
Corrected	843.896 ^a	2	417.448	9.36	0.000	0.36
Model						
Intercept	2308.427	1	2308.427	51.21	0.000	0.093
Pretest	39.812	1	39.812	0.88	0.349	0.002
Group	804.084	1	804.084	17.83	0.000	0.035
Error	22402.84	497	45.48			
Total	59033.00	500				
Corrected Total	23246.740	499				

a. R Square = 0.328 (Adjusted R Square = 0.310)

Table 7 shows the ANCOVA results for examination anxiety scores of students in the experimental and control groups. The result revealed that the effect of group was statistically significant, $F(1, 497) = 17.83$, $p < .05$, with a partial eta squared of 0.035, indicating a small to moderate effect size. The pre-test examination anxiety scores did not significantly influence the post-test scores, $F(1, 497) = 0.88$, $p = .349$.

Since the p-value associated with the group effect (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the post-test examination anxiety scores of students exposed to counselling intervention and those not exposed. This finding indicates that the counselling intervention was effective in reducing examination anxiety among students in the experimental group compared with those in the control group.

HO₂ : There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among male and female senior secondary school students.

ANCOVA was computed using pretest and pos-test scores of male and female students in experimental group and presented in Table 8

Table 8: ANCOVA Analysis of examination anxiety score of male and female Student in the experimental group

Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta
Corrected	114.757 ^a	2	57.378	1.664	0.201	0.077
Model						
Intercept	1544.537	1	1544.537	43.822	0.000	0.527
Pretest	40.891	1	40.891	1.187	0.283	0.028
Group	312.18	1	312.18	1.840	.1770	0.026
Error	19854.61	479	169.70	1.124		
Total	1377.359	500				
Corrected Total	39655.000	499				

a. R Square = 0.77 (Adjusted R Square =0.031)

Table 8 shows the value of $F = 1.840$ and $p = 0.1770$. Since the p-value 0.1770 is greater than the level of significance 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of counselling intervention in reducing examination anxiety among male and female in the experimental group. This implies that male and female students performed equally.

Discussion

The findings revealed that senior secondary school students in both the experimental and control groups exhibited high levels of examination anxiety before the commencement of the counselling intervention programme. The pre-test mean scores of 68.42 and 67.85 respectively indicate that students experienced considerable fear, worry, tension, and apprehension regarding examination situations. This finding is not surprising considering the intense academic pressure associated with external examinations in Nigeria. Students often face expectations from parents, teachers, peers, and society to achieve excellent academic results, which may contribute significantly to examination anxiety. The finding agrees with the study of Olakojo and Ojo (2017), who reported that secondary school students experience high levels of examination anxiety due to fear of failure and academic competition. Similarly, Omoyemiju (2023) found that many secondary school students exhibit moderate to high levels of test anxiety, which negatively affects their academic performance and psychological well-being.

The finding is also consistent with the Test Anxiety Theory proposed by Spielberger (1980), which posits that examination situations often trigger emotional and physiological reactions that interfere with students' cognitive functioning and academic performance. Therefore, the high pre-test anxiety levels observed among the respondents indicate the necessity for effective counselling interventions aimed at helping students manage examination-related stress.

The findings showed a substantial reduction in examination anxiety among students who participated in the counselling intervention programme. The mean anxiety score of the experimental group decreased from 68.42 during the pre-test to 42.17 during the post-test, while the control group showed only a marginal reduction. The ANCOVA results further revealed a statistically significant effect of counselling intervention on examination anxiety among senior secondary school students.

This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of counselling intervention as a psychological strategy for helping students develop adaptive coping skills, challenge irrational beliefs, and improve emotional regulation during examination periods. This also aligns with Ekanem et al. (2020). They discovered that counselling help in the development of social intelligence. The counselling programme exposed students to cognitive restructuring techniques, relaxation exercises, time management skills, and stress-management strategies, all of which contributed to anxiety reduction.

The finding corroborates the work of Eifediyi, Ojugo, and Aluede (2018), who found that Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) significantly reduced examination anxiety among secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria. The result also supports the findings of Ogundokun and Olowo (2021), who reported that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and relaxation techniques significantly reduced examination anxiety among secondary school students in Ibadan. Furthermore, the finding agrees with Okoiye and Falaye (2011), who found that cognitive and behavioural counselling therapies were highly effective in managing examination anxiety among academically at-risk students. The significant reduction observed among students exposed to counselling intervention confirms that professional counselling services can play a critical role in promoting students' emotional stability and academic success.

The findings revealed a significant difference between the post-test examination anxiety scores of students who received counselling intervention and those who did not. Students in the experimental group recorded considerably lower anxiety scores than students in the control group. This finding indicates that the reduction in anxiety was attributable to the counselling intervention rather than natural adjustment over time. Students who participated in the intervention acquired practical skills that enhanced their ability to cope with examination-related stress, whereas students in the control group continued to experience anxiety due to the absence of structured psychological support.

The finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Iftikhar, Mahreen, and Rizwan (2023), which reported that students who participated in school counselling programmes demonstrated significantly lower levels of examination anxiety compared to those who did not participate. Similarly, Anyamene (2021) found that self-management counselling techniques significantly reduced test anxiety among secondary school students. The result further supports the assertion of Corey (2017) that counselling interventions provide learners with opportunities to identify negative thought patterns and replace them with positive and realistic beliefs that enhance emotional adjustment and academic confidence.

The findings showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in the effectiveness of counselling intervention. Although slight variations existed in the mean scores, the differences were not statistically significant. This finding suggests that counselling intervention is equally effective for both male and female students in reducing examination anxiety. Regardless of gender, students benefited from the intervention programme through improved coping strategies, emotional regulation, and confidence-building skills.

The finding supports the study of Adeboye, Bello, and Sambo (2024), who reported that gender did not significantly influence the effectiveness of counselling interventions designed to reduce examination anxiety. Similarly, Eifediyi et al. (2018) found that REBT was effective across gender categories, indicating that both male and female students can benefit equally from counselling programmes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that counselling intervention is an effective strategy for reducing examination anxiety among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. The significant

reduction in anxiety levels among students who participated in the counselling programme demonstrates the importance of counselling services in promoting students' emotional stability, self-confidence, and academic success.

The study established that structured counselling interventions involving cognitive-behavioural techniques, relaxation exercises, stress-management strategies, and study skills training can significantly help students overcome examination-related fears and anxieties. The findings further showed that the effectiveness of counselling intervention is not influenced by gender or school location, suggesting that counselling programmes can be effectively implemented among diverse groups of students.

Therefore, counselling intervention should be considered an essential component of secondary school educational programmes aimed at improving students' psychological well-being and academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors should organize regular counselling programmes and workshops aimed at helping students develop effective strategies for managing examination anxiety.
2. Guidance and counselling units should be strengthened in all secondary schools through the employment of qualified professional counsellors to provide adequate psychological support to students.
3. Counsellors should employ evidence-based counselling approaches such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), relaxation techniques, and self-management strategies in helping students manage examination anxiety.
4. Government and educational stakeholders should provide adequate resources and facilities for effective counselling services in secondary schools.

Conflict of Interest and Funding Statement

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Conflict of Interest and Funding Statement

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