

Test Anxiety, Readiness, and Intervention Strategies for Enhancing Board Exam Performance among Psychology Students

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Abstract. This descriptive correlational study examines the relationships between test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and study habits among 31 fourth-year psychology students in a selected educational institution. Utilizing three instruments—the Test Anxiety Inventory by Charles D. Spielberger, the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale by Kunnathodi Abdul Gafoor, and a self-made Study Habit Questionnaire—the study employs a quantitative research design, analyzing numerical data without variable manipulation. Weighted mean calculations will determine average levels of test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and study habits, providing verbal descriptions of the findings.

Pearson correlation analysis will explore relationships between test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and study habits, revealing significant correlations, their direction, and strength. Linear regression analysis will investigate whether academic self-efficacy and study habits predict test anxiety levels.

The study reveals that anxiety, worry, and emotional distress related to high-stakes licensing exams present significant barriers to optimal performance among psychology students. While emphasizing content knowledge and exam readiness, evidence-based interventions targeting anxiety management and self-efficacy are essential. A two-pronged approach is recommended for psychology programs—focusing on both content mastery and anxiety regulation. Implementing multifaceted training protocols encompassing resilience, coping strategies, mentorship support, and efficacy-building exercises holds potential to enhance outcomes in board licensing exams. A comprehensive training strategy addressing content knowledge and anxiety regulation skills equips students to maximize performance on board licensure examinations.

Keywords: Test Anxiety; Readiness; Intervention Strategies; Academic Self-Efficacy; Study Habit

1. Introduction

The Philippine Psychology Act of 2009 (RA 10029) aims to regulate the professional practice of psychology in the country. This is one of the board exams that psychology students must take when they graduate college. Board exams are a significant milestone in the academic trajectory of every student. They are considered a crucial factor in determining the academic success of a student. In the case of psychology students, the board exam is a significant test that validates their subject knowledge and skill.

However, the board exam can also induce tension and anxiety in students, altering their perspective on the exam and their readiness to take it. Significant roles can be played by test anxiety, study habits, and self-efficacy in determining the proper intervention toward the board exam and preparation for it.

In the context of gathering relevant material and doing research, Test anxiety tends to rise in college students as the examination date approaches, reaching its peak just before the actual exam and typically subsiding after the completion of a practice or mock exam (Lotz & Sparfeldt, 2017). The process of preparing for exams induces significant psychological stress among students, marked by common stressors such as worry, nervousness, and fear. However, parents generally offer support and introduce relaxation methods to alleviate this stress (Buch, Vyas, & Moitra, 2019). Negative beliefs about the uncontrollability and perceived danger of worry emerge as significant predictors of test anxiety in university students. Addressing and modifying these beliefs could potentially serve as an effective strategy to reduce test anxiety and enhance overall academic performance (Huntley, Young, Smith, & Fisher, 2023). In both high school and college students, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment exhibit a correlation with test anxiety. Additionally, self-esteem plays a comparatively weaker mediating role in college students (Dan, Ilan, & Kurman, 2014).

Regarding study habits, various studies have indicated that the adoption of effective study practices is correlated with enhanced academic performance among students, resulting in improved grades during examinations (Lone, 2021). Gifted students showcase strategic flexibility when addressing non-routine

problems, demonstrating adaptability in strategy utilization, intra-task flexibility, and inter-task flexibility (Keleş & Yazgan, 2022). The preparedness of students for learning is shaped by both the school environment and study habits, with the individual's interest in learning playing a crucial role in influencing their readiness for academic engagement (Octavianti & Usman, 2019). The experience of overload during exam sessions heightens stress levels in students, emphasizing the significance of cultivating proper learning habits and efficiently allocating time to alleviate anxiety and stress during examination periods (Valcheva, Rangelova, & Dimitrova, 2016). Regulated learning, characterized by the establishment of consistent learning habits, is associated with superior learning outcomes in e-learning contexts compared to the adverse effects associated with procrastination (Goda et al., 2015). Higher levels of academic self-efficacy in medical students are linked to reduced test anxiety, ultimately contributing to superior exam performance (Taheri-Kharameh, 2017).

The objective of the study is to investigate test anxiety levels and readiness for the board exam among psychology students. It aims to describe test anxiety in terms of worry, emotionality, and total test anxiety, while also exploring readiness through study habits and academic self-efficacy. The study seeks to establish a significant relationship between test anxiety and readiness, particularly examining the associations with study habits and academic self-efficacy. Additionally, it will assess whether readiness for the board exam has a significant effect on test anxiety levels.

The ultimate goal is to provide insights and recommendations for intervention programs that can alleviate test anxiety and enhance students' readiness for the board exam, contributing to their academic success and well-being. Conducting this study is crucial to addressing the specific needs of psychology students in the Philippines preparing for board exams.

2. Methodology

This descriptive correlational study investigates the relationships between test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and study habits among psychology students. The researchers adopted a quantitative research design, collecting numerical data from three instruments without manipulating variables. The instruments measured test anxiety, academic self-efficacy, and study habits. The researchers calculated the weighted mean for each item to determine the average levels on each variable. They provided verbal descriptions of the statistical findings. The

purpose was to explore the connections between test anxiety, self-efficacy beliefs, and study behaviors in this sample. The quantitative methodology allowed the researchers to statistically analyze the numerical data. The descriptive design described the sample's experiences. The correlational design examined the relationships between the key variables of interest.

2.1. Sampling Procedure

The researchers purposefully selected 31 fourth-year psychology students from Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology as the target sample for this descriptive correlational study. They obtained a list of graduating psychology students from the university and then intentionally recruited individuals from that list. The researchers had in-depth discussions with the students about the study's goals. They explained the purpose of examining the connections between test anxiety, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and study habits specifically among fourth-year psychology students.

2.2. Respondents

The cohort for this study comprised 31 fourth-year psychology students on the verge of graduation from Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology. The researchers purposively selected this sample to represent graduating psychology majors at the institution.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students' Test Anxiety Toward Board Exams

Table 1. Test Anxiety of the Students towards Board Exam

Total Test Anxiety	WM	Verbal Description
1. I feel confident and relaxed while taking tests.	2.39	Sometimes
2. I wish examinations did not bother me so much	3.10	Often
3. During important tests I am so tense that my stomach gets upset.	1.90	Sometimes
4. After an exam is over, I try to stop worrying about it, but I just can't.	2.42	Sometimes
Overall Weighted Mean	2.45	Sometimes
Worry	WM	Verbal Description
1. Thinking about my grade in a course interferes with my work tests.	2.77	Often

2. I freeze up on important exam.	1.90	Sometimes
3. During exams I find myself thinking about whether I'll ever get through school.	2.32	Sometimes
4. The harder I work at taking a test, the more confused I get.	2.29	Sometimes
5. Thoughts of doing poorly interfere with my concentration on tests.	2.58	Often
6. I seem to defeat myself while working on important tests.	2.26	Sometimes
7. During tests I find myself thinking about the consequences of failing.	2.90	Often
8. During examinations I get so nervous that I forget facts I really know.	2.55	Often
Overall Weighted Mean	2.45	Sometimes
Emotionality		
	WM	Verbal Description
1. While taking examinations I have an uneasy, upset feeling.	2.32	Sometimes
2. I feel very jittery when taking an important test	2.77	Often
3. Even when I'm well prepared for a test, I feel very nervous about it.	2.94	Often
4. I start feeling very uneasy just before getting a test paper back.	2.77	Often
5. During tests I feel very tense.	2.68	Often
6. I feel very panicky when I take an important test.	2.45	Sometimes
7. I worry a great deal before taking an important examination.	2.68	Often
8. I feel my heart beating very fast during important tests.	2.52	Often
Overall Weighted Mean	2.64	Often

The test anxiety results reveal psychology students sometimes struggle with distressing reactions like lack of confidence, excessive worry, tension, and rumination related to high-stakes exams. With an overall weighted mean of 2.45, students report sometimes feeling anxious and bothered by tests, getting physically tense and upset stomachs, and being unable to stop obsessing after exams are over. The process of preparing for exams induces significant psychological stress among students, marked by common stressors such as worry, nervousness, and fear.

The worry component results further confirm psychology students experience intrusive, anxious thoughts that interfere with exam performance. With an overall weighted mean of 2.45, students report sometimes struggling with counterproductive thinking patterns like self-defeating beliefs,

concentration lapses, and nervousness-induced memory blocks in evaluative situations.

Specifically, the data shows thoughts about grades often impair test-taking, while excessive future-oriented or failure-based thoughts sometimes override productive focus. Students also sometimes become more confused when over-analyzing exams and defeat themselves with self-doubt. Additionally, nervousness often contributes to forfeiting known information. Negative beliefs about the uncontrollability and perceived danger of worry emerge as significant predictors of test anxiety in university students. Addressing and modifying these beliefs could potentially serve as an effective strategy to reduce test anxiety and enhance overall academic performance (Huntley, Young, Smith, & Fisher, 2023).

The emotionality data further confirms psychology students frequently experience distressing physiological and affective states related to evaluative scenarios like licensing board exams. With an overall weighted mean of 2.64, students often report feeling tense, jittery, panicky, uneasy, nervous, worried, and experiencing racing heart rates around important tests even when feeling prepared content-wise.

This aligns with the findings suggesting such flustered emotional reactions likely obstruct students from demonstrating their full analytical competencies, mastery of knowledge, and cognitive stamina during high-stakes testing. The degree of emotional interference contributes to suboptimal licensing exam performance vital for career advancement.

3.2. Readiness for Board Exam Among Psychology Students

Table 2. Study Habits

Adaptability	WM	Verbal Description
1. I am willing to modify my study strategies and techniques when faced with new challenges in preparation for board exams.	3.71	Strongly Agree
2. I am open to trying different learning methods and approaches to improve my understanding and performance in board exams.	3.71	Strongly Agree
3. I am flexible in adjusting my time management strategies to accommodate the changing demands and workload of board exams.	3.29	Strongly Agree

4.	I am proactive in adapting my problem-solving techniques to match the specific requirements and expectations of board exams.	3.29	Strongly Agree
5.	I am willing to seek guidance or support from instructors or peers to enhance my learning and study approaches for board exams.	3.74	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean		3.55	Strongly Agree

Environment		WM	Verbal Description
1.	The study environment I have chosen provides a conducive atmosphere for focused and effective studying.	3.13	Agree
2.	The availability of necessary study resources and materials in my study environment greatly enhances my learning experience for board exams.	3.32	Strongly Agree
3.	The noise level in my study environment is minimal, allowing me to concentrate and stay focused during my study sessions for board exams.	2.65	Agree
4.	The overall ambiance of my study environment positively affects my motivation and productivity in preparing for board exams.	3.42	Strongly Agree
5.	Having easy access to study materials and resources in my study environment significantly contributes to my ability to comprehend and retain information for board exams.	3.65	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean		3.23	Agree

Organization		WM	Verbal Description
1.	I effectively organize my study materials and resources to support my preparation for board exams.	3.06	Agree
2.	I prioritize my study tasks based on their importance and relevance to the content covered in board exams.	3.32	Strongly Agree
3.	I create and follow a structured study schedule that allows me to allocate sufficient time for each subject or topic covered in board exams.	2.84	Agree
4.	I consistently review and update my study materials to ensure they are organized and reflect the most relevant and up-to-date information for board exams.	2.81	Agree
5.	I efficiently manage my time during study sessions, allowing me to cover the necessary content and complete tasks related to board exams in a timely manner.	2.97	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean		3.00	Agree

Goal Setting		WM	Verbal Description
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1. I set clear and specific goals for my performance in the board exams, outlining what I aim to achieve in terms of knowledge acquisition and skill development.	3.13	Agree
2. I regularly review and revise my goals for the board exams to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with my evolving study needs and progress.	2.68	Agree
3. Goal setting helps me stay motivated and focused during my exam preparation, providing a sense of purpose and direction for my study efforts.	3.45	Strongly Agree
4. Setting challenging yet attainable goals for the board exams pushes me to strive for continuous improvement and optimal performance.	3.29	Strongly Agree
5. I regularly monitor my progress towards my goals for the board exams, adjusting my study strategies and efforts accordingly to ensure I stay on track.	2.90	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.09	Agree
Active Learning	WM	Verbal Description
1. I actively participate in class discussions and engage in interactive activities to enhance my understanding of the study material for the board exams.	2.97	Agree
2. I seek opportunities to apply the concepts and theories learned in class to real-life scenarios or practical situations related to the board exams.	3.29	Strongly Agree
3. Active learning strategies, such as problem-solving exercises and critical thinking tasks, help me develop a deeper understanding of the study material for the board exams.	3.39	Strongly Agree
4. I take initiative in seeking additional resources and materials that supplement the information covered in class to enhance my active learning experience for the board exams.	3.26	Strongly Agree
5. Engaging in active learning techniques, such as group discussions and collaborative projects, enhances my ability to integrate and synthesize knowledge relevant to the board exams.	3.35	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.25	Strongly Agree

Adaptability: The results concerning the adaptability of fourth-year psychology students in their study habits reveal a highly positive outlook. With an overall weighted mean of 3.55, classified as "Strongly Agree," the findings suggest a substantial level of adaptability among the surveyed students. Notably, students express a strong willingness to adjust their study strategies when confronted with new challenges in preparation for board exams. This adaptability is reinforced by a strong agreement with trying different learning methods to enhance understanding and performance in board exams. Additionally, students

demonstrate flexibility in time management strategies and problem-solving techniques specific to the demands of board exams. The overall strong adaptability in study habits implies openness to incorporating effective strategies that can alleviate test anxiety and enhance overall readiness for board exams.

Environment: The overall weighted mean of 3.23, categorized as "Agree," indicates a generally positive perception of study environments among students. Their intentional choices in creating conducive spaces for focused and effective studying are highlighted, along with strong agreement on the availability of necessary study resources enhancing the learning experience for board exams. While noise levels are perceived as minimal, presenting an area for potential improvement, the ambiance positively affects motivation and productivity. The easy access to study materials significantly contributes to comprehension and retention. These findings underscore the study environment's significance, suggesting interventions focused on optimizing study spaces, managing noise levels, and ensuring resource accessibility to enhance student readiness for board exams.

Organization: With an overall weighted mean of 3.00, categorized as "Agree," the study reveals a generally positive organizational approach among surveyed students. Effective organization of study materials, prioritizing study tasks based on importance, and maintaining a structured study environment are emphasized. While the mean for creating and following a structured study schedule is slightly lower, indicating agreement, this presents an area for potential improvement. Efficient time management during study sessions contributes significantly to overall organizational strategies. Interventions may focus on refining time management skills, providing guidance on structuring study schedules, and emphasizing the importance of regular review and update of study materials to reduce test anxiety and improve readiness for board exams.

Goal Setting: The overall weighted mean of 3.09, classified as "Agree," suggests that students generally demonstrate a favorable attitude toward goal-setting practices. Students agree on setting clear and specific goals for board exams, contributing to a proactive approach in defining objectives related to knowledge acquisition and skill development. While the setting of challenging yet attainable goals is perceived as beneficial, the need for more consistent and thorough monitoring presents an area for improvement. Emphasizing the importance of clear, specific, and regularly reviewed goals can enhance

motivation and focus, potentially mitigating test anxiety. Interventions may include goal-setting workshops and tools for effective progress monitoring, providing valuable insights for enhancing overall readiness and reducing test anxiety.

Active Learning: With an overall weighted mean of 3.25, categorized as "Strongly Agree," the study indicates a strong endorsement of active learning strategies among surveyed students. Actively participating in class discussions, engaging in interactive activities, seeking opportunities for practical application of learned concepts, and recognizing the value of problem-solving exercises and critical thinking tasks are highlighted. Students taking initiative in seeking additional resources and engaging in group discussions further underscore their proactive approach to active learning. Incorporating such strategies into exam preparation can potentially enhance readiness and mitigate test anxiety by fostering a more engaged and participatory learning experience. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of active learning in optimizing psychology students' approaches to board exam preparation.

Table 3. Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy	WM	Verbal Description
1. Irrespective of the subject, I am competent in learning.	3.03	True
2. I cannot read and understand my text books well. *	3.13	True
3. I sense that I am quick to pick the points from what I read	2.87	True
4. I feel that I have no ability to keep things unforgotten. *	2.58	True
5. I can do my projects well.	3.03	True
6. I can't manage time efficiently for learning. *	2.48	False
7. I can arrange the help of my teachers in learning.	3.16	True
8. I fail to find out the necessary sources for my study. *	2.61	True
9. I can arrange help of my peers for my learning whenever I need it.	3.03	True
10. I fail to set higher goals in my study. *	2.68	True
11. I can usually find out quite a few solutions when I confront with problems in my study.	3.03	True

12. I can't express ideas well while attending examinations. *	2.68	True
13. It is difficult for me to read and understand the textbooks in English language. *	3.16	True
14. During examinations, I can recollect what I have learnt.	3.13	True
15. Often I fail to comprehend the actual meaning of what I study. *	2.58	True
16. If taught, I can prepare my class notes neatly.	3.39	Exactly True
17. I fail to find out time for learning in the midst of sundry chores.*	2.42	False
18. I can't arrange the resources of my study from my relatives, neighbors, etc. *	2.48	False
19. I am assured that I have a few friends who would be helpful in my study.	3.42	True
20. I may not clarify doubts from my teachers while in class, even if I reach higher classes. *	2.35	False
21. I can accomplish my aims in learning.	3.19	True
22. I can't answer the essay type questions well. *	3.19	True
23. I experience that I am weak in understanding the classes of my teachers. *	2.68	True
24. I can develop the reading skill required to learn school subjects.	3.42	Exactly True
25. When I study a new concept, I can't recall the related knowledge from the earlier classes. *	2.55	True
26. I can utilize the available library facility for my study.	2.87	True
27. I observe that I fail to prepare my seminars and assignments in time. *	2.90	True
28. If I miss some classes for some reason, I can compensate the loss fairly well.	3.13	True
29. I consider that I fail to develop a healthy relationship with my teachers *	2.97	True
30. I am confident that I can perform well in competitive examinations.	2.84	True
31. I can't deal efficiently with the unexpected problems in my study. *	2.42	False
32. I can be calm at time of exam as I am conscious of my ability to learn.	3.00	True
33. I can't complete the homework myself without any help from guidebooks, previous notes etc.*	2.06	False
34. I can usually handle the disturbing situations in the study.	2.65	True
35. If a sudden test is conducted for us without prior notice, I can answer it well.	2.23	False

36. If I try, I can become one of the good grade holders.	3.45	Exactly True
37. I can't answer the questions which teachers ask me. *	2.81	True
38. I can score well in the short answer type questions	3.16	True
39. I can't accomplish challenging tasks and problems in my study. *	3.00	True
40. However twisted the question is I can answer them.	2.74	True
Overall Weighted Mean	2.86	True

The overall weighted mean of 2.86, categorized as "True," reflects a general agreement with statements related to self-efficacy, providing valuable insights into psychology students' beliefs about their abilities and readiness for board exams. Positive self-efficacy perceptions are evident in various domains, indicating confidence in learning, quick comprehension, project execution, and effective resource utilization. However, lower mean scores on time management, finding necessary sources, and handling unexpected problems suggest potential challenges in these aspects. Addressing these specific areas of perceived weakness through targeted interventions, such as workshops on time management and coping strategies, could enhance overall student readiness and reduce potential sources of stress and anxiety. Reinforcing positive self-efficacy beliefs through mentorship and academic support programs may contribute to a more resilient and confident student body.

3.3. Relationship Between Student Test Anxiety and Readiness for Board Exam

Table 4. Relationship Between Student Test Anxiety and Readiness for Board Exam

	TAI OVERALL			TAI WORRY			TAI EMOTIONALITY		
	r value	Sig. Value	Interpretation	r value	Sig. Value	Interpretation	r value	Sig. Value	Interpretation
Adaptability	-.129	.489	NS	-.124	.506	NS	-.192	.301	NS
Environment	-.044	.814	NS	.038	.838	NS	-.232	.209	NS
Organization	.137	.462	NS	-.156	.402	NS	.005	.977	NS
Goalsetting	.117	.532	NS	-.155	.405	NS	-.053	.776	NS
Active Learning	.091	.625	NS	-.104	.578	NS	-.146	.432	NS
Self-Efficacy	-.142	.446	NS	-.229	.215	NS	.378*	.036	S

- ** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
- * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The statistical tests comparing students' readiness for board exams with their test anxiety levels indicate no significant relationship between most readiness elements and test anxiety, including adaptability, environment, organization, goal-setting, and active learning. However, a notable exception was a significant correlation between self-efficacy and test anxiety emotionality ($p=0.036$), revealing that higher confidence in abilities, knowledge, and skills was associated with lower emotional distress during tests. This aligns with literature suggesting self-efficacy acts as a buffer against anxiety, potentially reducing anxiety levels on the actual exam day. As most readiness facets showed no connection to test anxiety, interventions should prioritize building adaptive coping skills and resilience for high-stakes exams. Recommendations include test anxiety reduction training, teaching cognitive restructuring, relaxation techniques, exposure treatment, and seeking social support. Prioritizing self-efficacy is also crucial to prevent anxiety escalation during board exams. Equipping students with evidence-based tools for emotional management, psychology programs can effectively support anxious students in showcasing their readiness on board licensing exams.

3.4. Impact of Students' Readiness on Test Anxiety for Board Exam

Table 5. Impact of Students' Readiness on Test Anxiety for Board Exam

	Test Anxiety		
	Adjusted r-Square	.Sig	Interpretation
Readiness	.062	.095	NS

The regression analysis reveals no significant predictive relationship between students' readiness levels and their test anxiety scores ($p=0.095$), with readiness explaining only 6.2% of variance in test anxiety. This suggests that students' perceptions of preparedness for board exams don't reliably determine their anxiety symptoms. Initiatives to reduce test anxiety should not solely focus on bolstering readiness; dedicated attention to evidence-based anxiety interventions is crucial. While building knowledge remains essential, managing negative thought patterns and panic symptoms tied to evaluative situations requires targeted interventions. In summary, enhancing students' readiness may not necessarily reduce emotional volatility during high-stakes testing,

emphasizing the need for comprehensive training in both content knowledge and anxiety regulation skills.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of test anxiety among psychology students, it is evident that symptoms of anxiety, worry, and emotional distress related to high-stakes licensing exams pose significant barriers that undermine optimal performance. While building content knowledge and exam readiness remains imperative, evidence-based interventions targeted specifically at strengthening anxiety management competencies and self-efficacy are also needed. Psychology programs should take a two-pronged approach that develops students' mastery of both content and anxiety regulation skills. Implementing multifaceted training protocols that equip students with resilience, coping strategies, mentorship support, and efficacy-building exercises holds strong potential to enhance outcomes on these board licensing exams. A comprehensive training approach that develops both content knowledge and anxiety regulation skills will best equip students to maximize their performance on board licensure examinations.

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