

**EFFECT OF EXAMINATIONAL STRESS ON STUDENTS ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, NIGERIA**

BY

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BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

NOVEMBER, 2025

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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ANTHROPOLOGY**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **MGBAKA AUSTIN PRINCE** with matriculation number **SSC2105946**, in the department of sociology and anthropology, faculty of social sciences, university of Benin, Benin City.

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(HEAD OF DEPARTMENT)

DATE.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God almighty, for his grace and mercy bestowed on me throughout my academic journey. And to my wonder parents who have encouraged me all the way to be where I am today.

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I express my profound gratitude to the Almighty God for granting me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to successfully complete this research work. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my supervisor, PROF. K. U. OMIYIBO for his invaluable guidance, constructive criticism, and unwavering support throughout the course of this study. His commitment and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping the quality and success of this research.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of examination stress on students of the University of Benin, with particular focus on its causes, manifestations, and influence on academic performance and general well-being. The research aims to identify the major sources of examination-related stress, assess its impact on students' academic outcomes, and examine the coping strategies employed by students in managing such stress. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire administered to a representative sample of students in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. The data obtained were analyzed using simple percentages and frequency distributions for clarity and easy interpretation. Findings revealed that factors such as inadequate preparation, fear of failure, pressure to achieve high grades, and poor time management significantly contribute to students' stress during examinations. The study further discovered that examination stress leads to anxiety, emotional instability, poor concentration, and a decline in academic performance among students. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the university management should organize regular counseling sessions and stress management seminars to assist students in handling examination-related pressure. Lecturers are also encouraged to create supportive learning environments, while students should adopt effective study habits and time management skills. In conclusion, the study affirms that examination stress, though an inevitable part of academic life, can be effectively managed through institutional support, personal discipline, and proper preparation, thereby improving students' academic performance and overall well-being

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Examination stress is a global concern that affects students across different educational systems and cultural settings. In many countries, examinations are used as key measures of academic achievement and future potential, making them significant sources of anxiety and psychological strain. Research across developed and developing nation's shows that students often experience restlessness, tension, and fear of failure when faced with high-stakes tests (Zeidner, 2007, Putwain & Daly, 2014). In countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea, examination pressure has been linked to extreme competition and mental fatigue among students (Lee & Larson, 2000, Liu & Lu, 2012). Likewise, in Western countries, studies have shown that test anxiety contributes to poor concentration, decreased motivation, and emotional exhaustion (Cassady & Johnson, 2002, Von der Embse, 2018). These findings demonstrate that examination stress is not limited to any one region but represents a shared educational challenge worldwide. This challenge takes on a unique intensity.

The problem is sustained not only by the structural challenges within universities but also by broader socio-economic and cultural expectations. While international research provides a useful foundation (Zeidner, 2007; Jerrim, 2023), there remains a need for studies that capture the experiences of Nigerian students. Such research is essential for informing policy interventions, counselling frameworks, and support services that can help students cope more effectively with the realities of examinations. As universities continue to demand resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence from their students (Anene-Okeke, 2024), addressing examination stress becomes an indispensable part of enhancing both academic performance and overall student well-being.

Education continues to occupy a central position in shaping individual life chances and national development. Universities, in particular, are viewed as spaces where knowledge is transmitted, talent is nurtured, and future leaders are produced. Within these institutions, examinations remain the most widely used mechanism for evaluating students' mastery of knowledge and

readiness for progression. Although examinations are considered essential, their consequences are often double-edged. On one hand, they encourage discipline, motivation, and accountability. On the other, they generate significant levels of stress and anxiety, especially in environments where success is closely tied to future opportunities (Hill & Sarason, 1966; Ramesh, 2023). This makes examinations not only an academic exercise but also a psychological and social challenge. The concept of examination stress or anxiety has therefore attracted considerable attention in educational research. It is generally described as the collection of physiological arousal, emotional unease, and cognitive interference that emerges when students are confronted with high-stakes evaluative situations (Zeidner, 2007). Scholars note that examination anxiety impairs concentration and reduces the capacity for effective recall, ultimately affecting performance (Baddeley, 2010; Almarzouki, 2024). For some students, this anxiety is momentary and manageable, but for many, especially those in competitive or resource-constrained systems, it becomes chronic and debilitating. The Korean experience, popularly referred to as “examination hell,” illustrates this vividly: excessive study hours, coupled with societal expectations, have been linked to high levels of distress and depression among young people (Lee & Larson, 2000). Similar observations have been made among primary school pupils, where standardized testing environments provoke anxious responses that undermine performance (Segool, Carlson, Goforth, von der Embse, & Barterian, 2013).

In Nigeria universities present a particularly pressing case, where examinations are not only academic hurdles but social determinants of status and opportunity. Certificates serve as gateways to scarce employment opportunities, while failure is often met with stigma and disappointment from families and communities (Olorun & Akomolafe, 2013; Nkem, Nwankwo, & Mbachu, 2024). Consequently, Nigerian students frequently describe examinations as “make-or-break” experiences (Adebayo, 2012). This climate of expectation, combined with structural challenges such as overcrowded lecture halls, limited facilities, and inconsistent teaching quality, intensifies stress levels (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Studies within Nigerian universities confirm that students with higher levels of examination anxiety perform poorly, rely on maladaptive coping methods such as cramming, and are more prone to burnout (Okeke, 2016; Nwosu & Eze, 2020).

Examination stress among university students can be understood through the interaction of personal, environmental, and institutional factors rather than through abstract theoretical models. Individual differences such as personality, self-esteem, and prior academic experience play a significant role in determining how students respond to academic pressure (Adebayo, 2012; Olorun & Akomolafe, 2013). Environmental elements—including the competitiveness of the academic atmosphere, peer influence, and family expectations—further contribute to students' anxiety levels (Nwosu & Eze, 2020). At the institutional level, inadequate counselling services, overcrowded classrooms, and erratic academic calendars often worsen stress conditions (Adegbite, 2025). The combination of these elements creates an ecosystem where students are constantly required to adapt to demanding conditions with limited emotional and institutional support (Anene-Okeke, 2024).

How students cope with stress is a critical mediating factor. Effective strategies such as relaxation, time management, and seeking social support often reduce the harmful impact of stress, while avoidance and procrastination tend to worsen outcomes (Misra & McKean, 2000, Adebayo, 2012). In recent years, mindfulness-based approaches have gained prominence. Galante. (2018) demonstrated that mindfulness programs improved resilience and reduced stress among undergraduates, and their later study (2021) confirmed broader mental health benefits for adults. Li, Li, Dou, Wang, and Liu (2022) similarly found that trait mindfulness correlated positively with examination performance. Nigerian evidence reflects parallel concerns. Nwosu and Eze (2020) reported that sandwich students used mixed coping strategies, some constructive and others maladaptive, underscoring the urgent need for institutional support. Adegbite (2025) further revealed that students in online programs often face heightened stress due to limited access to mental health resources.

Beyond mindfulness and relaxation, other coping mechanisms such as exercise, proper sleep, cognitive restructuring, and goal-setting have been found to play an essential role in stress reduction (Kim & Park, 2018, Olorun & Akomolafe, 2013). Social connectedness also provides a vital boost, as students who maintain strong peer and family relationships are often better equipped to handle exam-related pressure (Misra & McKean, 2000, Nwosu & Eze, 2020). Conversely, reliance on unhealthy habits like substance use, excessive caffeine intake, or last-minute studying can aggravate stress levels and negatively influence academic performance (Adebayo, 2012, Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Consequently, promoting effective coping

mechanisms and creating supportive university environments remain crucial to improving students' academic success and emotional well-being in Nigeria.

It is important to note that the negative consequences of examination stress extend beyond performance in a single test. Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, and Angold (2003) established that psychiatric conditions developed during childhood and adolescence often have their roots in unmanaged stress and anxiety. Similarly, Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020) demonstrated that stress within secondary and higher education can lead to long-term psychological difficulties. In Nigeria, where counselling services remain limited and often underutilized (Okafor, Nwankwo, & Mbachu, 2024), these consequences may be even more pronounced. Students without adequate support are left vulnerable to chronic anxiety, depression, and declining academic outcomes.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For many students, the period of examinations is not only a test of knowledge but also a test of endurance. What should ideally serve as an avenue to demonstrate learning often turns into a source of intense psychological strain. Scholars have observed that excessive examination stress disrupts concentration, reduces memory efficiency, and in many cases undermines academic achievement (Baddeley, 2010, Almarzouki, 2024, Zeidner, 2007). Beyond academics, it also leaves lasting imprints on students' emotional well-being, with studies linking it to depression, reduced self-esteem, and maladaptive coping behaviours (Lee & Larson, 2000, Segool, Carlson, Goforth, von der Embse, & Barterian, 2013).

In many universities, the high stakes attached to examinations, combined with limited academic support, create a climate of constant pressure. Students often struggle to balance coursework, personal expectations, and family responsibilities, leading to physical exhaustion and emotional burnout (Nwosu & Eze, 2020, Adegbite, 2025). The growing competition for limited opportunities after graduation further amplifies the anxiety associated with examinations (Olorun & Akomolafe, 2013). Moreover, institutional factors such as inadequate counselling services, overcrowded classrooms, and inconsistent academic calendars exacerbate the situation, leaving many students without the resources or guidance needed to manage stress effectively (Okafor, Nwankwo, & Mbachu, 2024).

The emotional and psychological weight attached to examinations is compounded by structural and socio-economic realities. Many students study under difficult conditions, with limited access to adequate study materials, unstable power supply, and overcrowded lecture halls. The absence of consistent academic support and counselling services often leaves students to manage their anxiety alone (Okafor, Nwankwo, & Mbachu, 2024). In addition, financial pressures, uncertainty about job prospects, and the fear of disappointing one's family or community add further emotional strain. These overlapping challenges not only make examinations more stressful but also undermine students' confidence and motivation. Addressing these realities therefore requires that institutions prioritize student welfare through improved guidance, learning environments, and mental health interventions that can reduce the psychological burden of examinations.

Also academic performance is viewed as the key determinant of future opportunities, including employment, social mobility, and family pride (Adebayo, 2012; Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Consequently, students face pressure from multiple fronts personal ambition, parental expectations, and societal judgment. This culture of high stakes has been shown to intensify examination stress, leading to fear of failure, reliance on last-minute preparation, and in some cases, academic misconduct (Olorun & Akomolafe, 2013; Okeke, 2016). Addressing these challenges therefore requires a comprehensive approach that integrates academic support, psychological counselling, and wellness initiatives within the higher education system to promote healthier and more productive learning environments (**Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015; Misra & McKean, 2000**).

Globally, interventions such as resilience training, mindfulness, and stress management programmes have been tested with varying degrees of success (Galante et al., 2018; Li, Li, Dou, Wang, & Liu, 2022). Yet, Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020) caution that academic stress continues to be one of the strongest contributors to mental health challenges among students, particularly in higher education. This shows that despite decades of research, the problem persists as an obstacle to effective learning.

This gap in the literature underscores the need for further investigation. While international findings on coping strategies and resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2008; Thanusri & Zinna, 2021) offer valuable insights, they cannot be assumed to apply uniformly within Nigeria's unique

socio-cultural and institutional context. Without context sensitive research, universities risk underestimating the burden of examination stress and failing to design effective support systems for their students.

Therefore, this study is timely and necessary. By systematically examining examination stress among undergraduates in Nigerian universities, it will provide evidence-based insights into the prevalence, effects, and coping mechanisms related to this problem. More importantly, it will generate practical recommendations that can guide universities in creating supportive academic environments where students are assessed fairly without compromising their well-being

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to address the following relevant questions that arose within the domain of study problems:

1. What are the main causes of examination stress among undergraduates in the University of Benin
2. In what ways does examination stress affect students' academic performance and overall well-being?
3. What coping strategies do students adopt to manage examination stress, and how effective are these strategies?
4. How do institutional support structures influence students' experiences of examination stress?
5. What practical measures can be recommended to help undergraduates cope better with examination stress within the university system?

1.4 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to dive deeper into the understanding of how undergraduates in Nigerian universities (especially in the University of Benin City) experience and cope/respond to examination stress. To this end the study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To identify the major causes of examination stress among undergraduates, paying particular attention to academic demands, personal circumstances, and socio-cultural expectations.
2. To assess the impact of examination stress on students' academic performance, psychological well-being, and patterns of learning.
3. To examine the coping strategies students adapt, and how effective it is to manage examination stress.
4. To examine the contribution of institutional support services, such as counselling, mentoring, and student development programs in helping students manage examination stress.
5. To generate evidence-based recommendations that can inform interventions and policy measures aimed at reducing examination stress and promoting healthier learning environments in Nigerian universities

1.5 HYPOTHESIS

1. There is a significant relationship between academic, socio-cultural factors and the level of examination stress experienced by undergraduates.
2. Examination stress has a significant negative effect on students' academic performance.
3. Examination stress has a significant impact on students' psychological well-being and learning behaviors.
4. Coping strategies adopted by undergraduates significantly influence the extent to which they experience and manage examination stress.
5. Institutional support systems, such as counselling and mentoring services, have a significant effect on reducing examination stress among students

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it will add to knowledge and also provide practical solutions for students and universities in Nigeria. Examination stress is a common problem that affects

learning, performance, and mental health (Zeidner, 2007; Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). Yet in Nigeria, there are still not enough studies that focus on how students experience it and how schools can help reduce it. This research therefore comes at the right time.

The findings will assist students, encountering examination stress, by understanding the main causes and effects of stress, students can become more aware of what affects them and learn better ways of coping. It will also benefit university administrators and policymakers. With evidence from this study, schools can design better support systems, counselling services, and academic policies that make examinations less stressful for students. The study will be useful to researchers and counsellors, as it will add to the existing body of work on stress and coping in higher education. While many studies have been done in other countries this study provides findings that are specific to Nigeria. Finally, the study has societal value. When students are able to handle examination stress better, they are more likely to perform well, stay mentally healthy, and later contribute positively to national growth.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to undergraduate students living in Hall 3 residence of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. Hall 3 was chosen because it is a mixed-gender hostel, which allows both male and female students to be represented. It was also selected because it is easily accessible, making it possible to collect data within the available time and resources. The study will focus on the causes, effects, and coping strategies of examination stress among these students. Although the findings may not cover all undergraduates in the university, they will provide useful insights into how students in similar settings experience and manage examination stress.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study, like many others, was not without limitations. Although research findings play a vital role in identifying societal problems that may not be immediately visible, this study encountered certain challenges that may have influenced its scope and outcomes.

1. The short period available made it hard to reach more students or carry out a deeper investigation. If there had been more time, a larger group could have been involved and the findings would have been broader.
2. Another limitation came from the reluctance of some students to participate. A number of them were unwilling to give honest responses to the questionnaires or interviews. This was mainly because they feared being stigmatized or compared with others. Some felt that sharing openly might make them appear less intelligent than their peers, so they either avoided the study or gave incomplete answers. This reduced the level of openness in some of the data collected.

In addition, one of the challenges came from the researcher's own academic workload. As an undergraduate, the researcher had to balance this project with regular lectures, assignments, tests, and other academic activities. This created serious time pressure and limited the attention that could be given fully to the research process. The short time frame, combined with competing academic demands, made it difficult to reach a larger sample size or engage in a more detailed and prolonged data collection. For example, there was little opportunity to make repeated visits to respondents or to carry out follow-up discussions that could have yielded richer data. Similarly, the analysis had to be managed within a tight schedule, which restricted the level of depth that could have been achieved. Had there been more time, fewer academic pressures, and greater openness from the students, the study would have been able to cover a wider group and produce more robust findings. Despite these limitations, the research was still able to gather meaningful insights into examination stress and provides a good foundation for future studies

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviews existing literature related to the effect of examinational stress on students of the University of Benin. It provides a conceptual review of examinational stress, outlines relevant theoretical frameworks, and examines empirical studies carried out both globally and locally. The aim is to build a foundation for understanding the impact of examinational stress and highlight research gaps that this study intends to address.

Education is widely acknowledged as the most important tool for socio-economic development, as it improves productivity, promotes technological advances, and has a positive relationship with economic growth while opening opportunities (Pal, 2023). Exams serve multiple essential functions in education: they provide a structured assessment of student's knowledge and skills, help both learners and instructors identify strengths and areas for improvement, motivate students to engage more consistently with their studies, and promote skills such as time management and problem-solving which are useful beyond the classroom (Sireci & Greiff, 2019).

But in contrast, the academic environment of the average undergraduate student in Nigeria presents several social and psychological stresses that students face every day. These may range from Examination preparations to lack of money, and even cult-related problems. Stresses that emanate management decisions that affect students, like in school fees had also result in ripple

effects on students and faculties as well. Frequent power outage with its concomitant effects like lack of water, dirty hostels, etc. also add to students' stress. These scenarios painted above may not be a Nigerian peculiarity.

These assertions are true as Pekrum, (2002) argued that students experience a great variety of self-referenced, task-related and social emotions in academic settings. They also opined that, the effect of academic learning and academic achievement is pivotal in every aspect of life, starting from social relations, academic careers, and ability to allocate resources due to the fact that all the above-mentioned aspects depend on individual achievement. Furthermore, Pekrum (2002), stated that the influence of emotions on students' cognitive processes and performance has been suggested to be associated with students' psychological and physical health as well. Every student faces numerous challenges at multiple points during their academic journey and everybody perceives and deals with stress differently. Academic stress is an adaptive psychological systematic process that occurs in learning environments when students face challenges and perceive them as stressful (Toribio and Franco, 2016).

Academic Achievement encompasses students' academic potential. It is a common practice to promote students to next grades and classify them as pass or fail on the basis of their academic achievement scores. Academic achievement is generally referred to as how many marks a student is achieving in his academics. It is usually measured through conducting assessments or continual evaluations. Students go through different examinations through their whole academic life. It is a common practice to promote students to next grades and classify them as pass or fail on the basis of their academic achievement scores. (Shafiq and Muhammad Abiodullah. (2019)

Good assessments aim to provide a balanced and fair evaluation of each student. They achieve this in many ways. They use a variety of strategies and tasks, giving students multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do. Payton Field, 2018. Most students seem to attribute their life and career outcomes solely to exam results. Considering that test anxiety is not just a factor but a cause of academic failure (Putwain, 2008). The students' academic achievement scores are influenced by various factors and examination stress is one of these.

Examination stress is most widely recognized cognitive issue affecting students' academic achievement scores. It can influence students', sense of pride, companion connections and social

practices (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, & Angold, 2003). Students of every academic potential can be affected by test anxiety/examination stress. The way of everyone expressing it is different from another. Few students become terrified in tests or examination because of the apprehensions of the reaction of their parents in case of their low academic achievement or failure (Hill, 1980).

Mukesh Kumar Singh (2022) connote that students of higher education faces extreme pressure as a result of cut throat competition for survival of the fittest. Everyone wants good grades in fact outstanding grades, necessary to excel in today's competitive professional world. Not only students but parents, teacher's expectations from their children have also been influenced by this trend. They expect higher grades from their children and put pressure on them to perform better. The success of students is decided by their examination score rather than the knowledge or skill they acquire. Mukesh Kumar Singh also said that it is generally believed that a fair amount of examination stress is beneficial for academic success but sometimes excess of it may.

Conceptual Review Examination stress is a widely studied phenomenon in educational psychology and student development. It is defined as a psychological and physiological state of tension experienced by students in anticipation of, during, or following examinations. According to Owusu and Essel (2017), examination-related stress arises when students perceive the academic demands placed on them as exceeding their coping abilities. Similarly, Sarwar, Bashir, and Khan (2019) describe it as an adverse emotional reaction caused by evaluative academic assessments.

According to Dave Putwain (2008) examination stress in what he called "Test Anxiety" as situation-specific trait accounting for individual differences in the extent to which people find examinations threatening. He also narrowed his definition to therefore imply that examination stress or test anxiety is the "fear of failure during examinations". Dr. Samudra Senarath also defined Examination stress as a specific condition of anxiety and tension experienced during examinations. People with examination stress display overt as well as less obvious changes in behavior and these changes can be positive or negative in nature and effect. He also empathizes that sometimes students 'exam stress can lead to mental health issues and while it is perfectly normal to feel some stress, excessive anxiety will reduce effectiveness.

Examination stress is a common condition faced by students prior to exams and it is quite predominant among students. Every year about 25,000 students in the age group of 18 to 20 years commit suicide during the examination months (i.e. March to June) in Rajasthan, India (Banerjee's (2001), Due to high examination-related stress, the students spent less time socializing and engaged in passive and active leisure, which may further magnify the effects of examination stress (Lee and Larson, (2000). He further detailed the signs experienced by students who are facing pre and post-examination stress these include irregular sleep, feeling tired, isolated or sad, aching all over, suffering from stomach upsets, a feeling of restlessness or a condition where you cannot recall what you studied, panicking when you see a question and you cannot answer it, and your mind going blank.

Sasikumar & Bapitha (2019) defined examination stress as the feeling of pressure that young people or students feel in time of examination, revision, after examination. He further explained that stress or examination stress causes pressure and when there is too much pressure is becomes stressful.

In Nigerian universities, Examinational stress has become one of the most significant challenges facing students. Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) observed that academic pressure, combined with societal expectations, amplifies stress responses among undergraduates. The University of Benin, like many other public universities in Nigeria, is characterized by large class sizes, limited facilities, and competitive grading systems, all of which contribute to heightened levels of stress among students. Students are often expected to memorize large volumes of information and reproduce them under strict time constraints, which leads to high levels of cognitive and emotional strain (Al-Qahtani, 2020). The concept of stress itself has been extensively theorized in psychology. Hans Selye's general burnout or performance anxiety (exhaustion phase) if demands exceed coping resources. Afolayan et al. (2019) reported that students experiencing sustained stress during examinations often demonstrate lower academic performance, sleep disruption, and increased irritability.

The manifestation of examination stress varies among students, depending on factors such as individual resilience, family background, and social support systems. For example, Adekeye et al. (2017) noted that students from supportive families often exhibit lower levels of stress compared to those lacking strong social ties. Stress also differs by academic discipline, with professional

courses such as medicine, law, and engineering associated with higher stress due to their demanding curricula (Hussain et al., 2018). Gender differences have also been identified, with female students often reporting higher stress levels than male

Counterparts, attributed to both academic and socio-cultural pressures (Kapasias et al., 2020). In addition, lifestyle and coping strategies strongly influence how students manage stress. Healthy coping mechanisms such as exercise, time management, and peer support tend to reduce the adverse effects of stress, whereas maladaptive responses like substance abuse, social withdrawal, and procrastination exacerbate the problem. Ibrahim and Abdelreheem (2019) found that students engaging in effective time management were less likely to experience severe academic burnout during examination periods.

Symptoms of examination stress include headaches, poor sleep, irritability, fatigue, and reduced concentration. These manifestations interfere with academic performance and overall well-being (Shah, 2021). Psychological symptoms such as anxiety, restlessness, and feelings of helplessness are particularly prevalent among students who fear failure or lack adequate preparation. Long-term exposure to examination stress can also contribute to mental health conditions such as depression (Arslan, 2019).

Almarzouki, Abeer. (2024). with the use of the concept of working memory (WM) explained the effect of examinational stress on students' academic performance. According to him, WM is a key cognitive function that is important for learning academic skills, such as reading, comprehension, problem-solving, and math. WM influences various cognitive and learning abilities and is a determining factor for academic performance. Additionally Baddely said that WM is a core cognitive function that involves the ability to cognitively store and actively utilize information over brief periods (Baddeley, 2010).

Almarzouki, Abeer. F.(2024), furthers empahsized that Stress including examinational stress can impede academic performance by affecting WM(working memory) and other cognitive processes as well as causing demotivation, low self-esteem, and weak coping skills in students.He said that when students experience excessive stress, their cognitive load becomes overwhelming, hindering effective learning. Lee & Larson, (2000) and Lou & Chi, (2000) stated that examination stress is a student's interactions between environmental stressors, the student's cognitive appraisal of and coping with the academic- related stressors and psychological or

physiological response to the stressors. It is a specific kind of disturbance and pressure that perceive by students during examination period.

University students have many barriers to overcome in order to achieve their optimum result in university life. Among that, Examinations are considered as a factor, which creates stress in research as earlier, and it was just considered as one of the aspect in stressors, which create stress to students. Exam stress is a set of responses that include excessive worry, depression, nervousness and irrelevant thinking to a class of stimuli from an individual's experience of assessment and outcome (Gajalakshmi G. 2012).

The pressure to perform well in exams can lead to heightened stress levels, impacting students' mental and emotional well-being. The fear of failure and the competitive nature of exams contribute to an environment where students may experience anxiety disorders and increased stress-related behaviors (Dr. S. Ramesh. 2023)

Examination anxiety can create a vicious circle: the more a person focuses on the bad things that could happen, the stronger the feeling of anxiety becomes. This makes the person feels worse because his mind is preoccupied with distracting thoughts and fears. It can increase the possibility that the student will carry out improperly during the test Most students experience some level of anxiety before and during tests. However, when anxiety affects tests performance negatively, it becomes a problem. Several students participate in the class, do activities, homework, and come well prepared for the test, but when the day of the test comes, some of them freeze up, zone out, or feel so nervous that they cannot pass the test. Hence, they cannot respond properly to the questions, even if they know their answers. This is a clear case of test anxiety. According to Gershaw (2001), students often perform poorly in examinations due to overwhelming feelings of anxiety. Test and performance anxiety typically arise in situations that seem difficult, threatening, or highly challenging—especially when individuals doubt their own ability to cope with the task and fear the potential consequences of failure. Lyness (2004) notes that students may feel unready for exams for different reasons: inadequate study, difficulty understanding the material, or exhaustion caused by insufficient sleep the previous night and this increase stress during examinations.

Additionally, a number of theories exist to explain examination stress and its effects on the academic performance of university students. Among these are the Cognitive Appraisal Theory,

the Person–Environment Fit Theory, Hans Selye’s General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), the Transactional Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2023), among others. These theories provide useful insights into how stress develops, how students appraise it, and the ways in which it influences academic performance and well-being. One of the most influential frameworks in this regard is the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The central argument of the theory is that stress does not arise directly from external events, but rather from the way individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate those events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In other words, stress is viewed as a transaction between a person and the environment, where the meaning attached to a situation determines the psychological outcome (Biggs, Brough & Drummond, 2017).

According to the theory, this evaluation occurs in two stages, namely primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. In the primary appraisal process, individuals assess whether a situation is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. Where it is appraised as stressful, it can be further categorized as a threat (anticipation of harm or loss), a challenge (opportunity for mastery or growth), or harm/loss (damage already experienced) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 2013). Secondary appraisal, on the other hand, refers to the individual’s assessment of the resources available to cope with the situation. If resources are deemed insufficient, stress is heightened; if adequate, the experience of stress may be reduced (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016). Cognitive Appraisal Theory explains why students may respond differently to the same examination conditions. For instance, a student who perceives an examination as a threat to their academic progress and believes they lack adequate preparation is likely to experience heightened anxiety and tension. Conversely, another student who perceives the same examination as a challenge and feels adequately prepared may experience reduced stress and even motivation to succeed (Folkman, 2013; Biggs et al., 2017).

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its emphasis on the subjective nature of stress appraisal. It demonstrates that examination stress among university students is not solely determined by the difficulty of the exams themselves, but also by how students evaluate the demands of the situation and the resources they can mobilize to cope effectively.

The main goal of this section has been to show the different types of stress that Nigerian undergraduates face in their daily academic life. These include examination pressure, lack of money, cult-related problems, and challenges that come from management decisions such as increases in school fees. Environmental issues such as frequent power outages, lack of water, and unclean hostels also add to the burden. As Pekrun, Goetz, and Titz (2002) explained, students in all parts of the world experience a wide range of task-related and social emotions in academic settings, and these emotions strongly affect their achievement and well-being. This makes it clear that the Nigerian case, though unique in some areas, also reflects a global reality of student stress.

This section has also shown that how students react to stress depends on how they see and judge their situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that stress is not only about the outside pressure but also about how a person thinks about it and whether they believe they have enough resources to cope. For example, one student may see an examination as a challenge and prepare with confidence, while another may see the same examination as a threat and feel anxious or helpless. Gershaw (2001) added that students often fail to perform well in examinations because of the strong feelings of anxiety that block their focus. In the same way, Lyness (2004) pointed out that students may feel unprepared if they have not studied enough, find the material too hard, or are tired from lack of sleep, all of which increase stress during exams.

In addition, stress in universities is not only about individuals but also about the structure of the academic environment. Pekrun et al. (2002) noted that emotions affect not just learning but also health, both physical and mental. This means that stress in school can have long-term effects on students' lives. When institutions do not provide good learning conditions or when policies increase pressure on students, the stress becomes worse. As Heywood (2004) explained in a political context, people's connection to systems and institutions shapes their attitudes and behavior. In the same way, students' connection to their schools influences how they see academic stress and how they cope with it.

It is also important to note that academic stress is not only about intelligence or hard work, but about the whole environment in which students live and learn. Individual coping skills are important, but institutional support is also necessary. Universities need to provide counseling services, better hostel conditions, and steady academic calendars to reduce the level of stress. By doing so, they can help students to face examinations and other challenges with more confidence

and less anxiety. This section has therefore provided a clear picture of how stress is created and experienced in Nigerian universities and why it must be addressed both at the personal and institutional level.

2.2 THE CAUSES OF EXAMINATIONAL STRESS

The causes of examinational stress on students in the university are broad in cannot be under emphasized.

According to Erygene (2003), pressure filled situation in which examination and test occurs can cause people to perform below their ability. Anxiety may be severe in examination setting that it significantly limits student's ability to demonstrate their knowledge. This is supported by the view of Limen (2016) that extreme anxiety can be quite debilitating and can result in serious underestimation of the student's basic scholastic ability and achievement. Brilliant students as well may perform badly due to anxiety created by factors like time limits, examination techniques, examination format environment, clarity and attitude of the invigilators or supervisors. He therefore concludes that examination anxiety is usually the cause of student's underachievement rather than their intellectual abilities. Luckmizankari. 2017 also added that, disturbance during examination also creates stress among students. Exams' procedures like ID card verification, signing in application form, long instruction in answer sheet to fill can trouble the students during exams, through this pressure will increase in examination hall.

Dr. Gul Snober (2002), depicted that, Lifestyle issues, poor rest, diet, and time management are the major causes of examinational stress. Students will worry if they don't arrange time to cover the material. Even if he/she reads the whole material and has little time for review, he/she may mistake one subject with another, making the student feel like he knows nothing or lost everything. He also emphasized on the psychological issues before exams may cause tension or anxiety. In his words he talked about our words can affect the psycho-mentality of student. Words can like "If I don't achieve a decent grade, I'll lose my respect or be worthless" is a rare student belief. Some students make dire predictions like "I will fail no matter how hard I work".

Limen, (2016) believes that task difficulty is among the factors that make learners worried. He also suggested that there is considerable evidence that the performance of the highly exam anxious individuals on a complex task is adversely affected by evaluation stress or "the less

complex the task, the weaker the effect". This fact is supported by a study of Adeola and Adedioe (2008) who found out that examination anxiety is more detrimental to the demanding tasks. According to Zeidner (1987), multiple choice type exams are more favorable than essay type questions in examination, by both boys and girls. It revealed that the content of exam paper also a factors to create examination stress among students. On the research of Sources of Academic Stress – A Study on Management Students of Prabhakar P.N and Gowthami .C stated that, pressure to get good grades through the exam was the cause of worry for about 50% of the students whereas around 40% were worried about sitting for the exam. Thus, examinations are the ostensible stressors for management students. Most students would say they prefer multiple choice since they are already given options, and that essays are the most stressful since they do not have any ways to guess or be given an introduction to the information needed to answer the question. After being in the classroom, though, it has been noticed that the performance on multiple choice and essay questions are often opposite to what the students believe to be harder. Amanda Ulery (2023).

Olorufemi (2003) said that High parental expectations/pressure can cause examinational stress/anxiety this can be induced by many factors which include parents, teachers, peer group and the society. Adeola, and Adedioe (2003) suggested that lack of effective study skills contributes to poor performance under the Anambra Counsellor evaluative conditions which in turn leads to heightened feeling of anxiety when it comes to performing in subsequent examinations. Enormous content to be covered in short period of time is another cause of examinational stress/anxiety. Spiel – Berger (2005). Course like chemistry is viewed by many students in tertiary institutions as a hard course because it involved the use of some basic arithmetic processes and practical's which students consider boring and cumbersome. Similarly, other courses that involve use of basic arithmetic have been found to be of great concern to students and causes increase in anxiety level especially during evaluation situation. Spiel – Berger (2005).

2.3 THE SYMPTOMS OF EXAMINATIONAL STRESS

Examinational stress/anxiety comes with many symptoms especially to the health, body etc. of students in the university. Kendra Cherry (2023), expressed that Symptoms of test anxiety vary considerably from person to person and can range from mild to severe. Some students experience

only mild symptoms of test anxiety and are still able to do fairly well on exams. Other students are nearly incapacitated by their anxiety, which may lead to poor test performance or even panic attacks before or during exams. Kendra then gave a proper breakdown on the symptoms of examinational stress into various categories which are: **Physical Symptoms, Emotional Symptoms, Cognitive and Behavioral Symptoms.**

Physical symptoms of test anxiety include:

Sweating, Shaking, Rapid heartbeat, Dry mouth, Fainting, Nausea. He also added that People may even vomit or experience diarrhea before a test.

Emotional symptoms of test anxiety include:

Depression, Low self-esteem, Anger, Feelings of hopelessness Distress. He also added to this that Students often feel helpless to change their situation. They may belittle and berate themselves for their symptoms and the resulting poor performance on exams.

Cognitive and behavioral symptoms of test anxiety include:

Fidgeting, Outright avoidance of testing situations, Forgetfulness, Self-doubt, Negative self-talk.

2.4 THE EFFECT OF EXAMINATIONAL STRESS

Examination stress is a common experience among students, especially during periods of high academic demand. Many students preparing for important examinations display visible signs of tension such as restlessness, trembling, fidgeting, or even panic attacks. This form of anxiety has been shown to interfere with critical cognitive processes including memory, concentration, decision-making, and learning, all of which are essential for effective performance.

Olurun and Akomolafe (2013) observe that examination anxiety is linked with a wide range of negative outcomes, such as psychological distress, academic underachievement, academic failure, and insecurity. In addition, students under severe pressure often perceive examinations as threatening, doubt their ability to succeed, develop low self-esteem, and sometimes resort to blaming others for expected poor outcomes.

Adeola and Adedio (2003) warn that if not carefully managed, such anxiety can escalate into deeper emotional problems or even neurotic disorders. The impact of examination stress is not only immediate but can also extend into long-term academic difficulties. Some of the short-term manifestations include crying, sudden illness, or even resorting to unethical practices such as cheating during examinations. However, the less visible consequences are equally damaging. Over time, students who constantly experience high test anxiety often show declining academic motivation, negative attitudes towards learning, and reduced self-confidence.

Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) explain that when examinations are perceived as threatening, the level of anxiety increases significantly before the test. This often results in poor preparation habits, ineffective study strategies, and weak test-taking techniques, which ultimately lower academic achievement.

Von der Embse, Jester, Roy and Post (2018) note that test anxiety disrupts working memory and attention, which directly undermines problem-solving during assessments. Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker (2020) further argue that prolonged stress reduces motivation, diminishes academic engagement, and in some cases contributes to school dropout. Putwain (2023) adds that students with high anxiety levels are particularly vulnerable in high-stakes examinations, not because of a lack of ability, but because worry and intrusive thoughts interrupt performance. Jerrim (2023), however, points out that the relationship between stress and achievement may vary depending on prior academic preparation and individual background, suggesting that not all students are affected equally.

Recent studies also highlight the role of protective factors in moderating the impact of exam stress. Putwain (2023b) introduces the concept of academic buoyancy, referring to the ability of students to cope with everyday academic challenges. Learners with higher buoyancy levels tend to report lower anxiety and maintain better performance under pressure. Similarly, Galante (2018) show that mindfulness-based interventions help university students reduce distress during examination periods, while Galante (2021) confirm that such programmes improve resilience, mental health, and academic persistence over time.

Kendra Cherry (2023), summarize some effects of examinational stress/anxiety. He said Test anxiety makes it very difficult to concentrate during an exam. Many people with test anxiety report blanking out on answers to the test even though they thoroughly studied the information

and were sure they would know the answers to the questions. In some cases, test anxiety can become so severe that students will drop out of school in order to avoid the source of their fear. Substance abuse can also occur since many students attempt to self-treat their anxiety by taking downers such as prescription medications and alcohol.

In summary, examination stress has serious implications for students' academic achievement. It not only reduces performance in the short term by interfering with cognitive functions, but also affects motivation, study habits, and long-term learning outcomes. However, with the right interventions—such as resilience training, mindfulness practices, and supportive learning environments—the negative effects of examination stress can be reduced, allowing students to reach their full academic potential.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several psychological and sociological theories provide a basis for understanding examination stress among university students. This study draws upon three major theoretical perspectives: the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, the Person-Environment Fit Theory, and the General Adaptation Syndrome. These frameworks help explain how students perceive, interpret, and respond to academic stressors.

2.5.1 Richard Stanley Lazarus and Susan Folkman's Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1984):

This study is anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Richard Stanley Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). The theory explains stress as a dynamic interaction between an individual and the environment, in which stress results not from the situation itself, but from how the individual appraises the situation and their ability to cope with it. It uses cognitive appraisal as a way to explain responses to stressful events. S., Lazarus, Richard (1984).

It is particularly suitable for exploring the effects of examination stress on university students because it emphasizes that stress is not simply a reaction to an event, but a process that depends on how individuals perceive and evaluate their circumstances. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress arises when students judge academic demands, such as examinations, as exceeding their resources to cope. In this sense, stress is not determined solely by the exam itself, but by the way in which each student interprets and responds to it. This Theory argues that stress

is not merely a stimulus or a response but arises from an individual's perception of and interaction with the environment. Students assess examination demands (primary appraisal) and then evaluate whether they possess the resources to cope (secondary appraisal). If the perceived demands exceed available coping resources, stress results (Folkman, 2015).

For example, a student who feels unprepared for a final examination may experience heightened anxiety, while another with adequate preparation may view the same examination as a manageable challenge. This theory emphasizes the role of subjective interpretation in shaping the stress experience.

Cognitive appraisal, a process in which individuals assess whether a situation is relevant to their well-being and whether they have the capacity to manage it. Cognitive appraisal takes place in two stages: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. In the primary appraisal stage, the student evaluates whether an upcoming examination is irrelevant, positive, or stressful. If it is appraised as stressful, it may be seen as a threat (anticipating possible failure or negative consequences), a loss (for example, reflecting on previous poor grades), or a challenge (an opportunity to improve performance and achieve success). For instance, one student may view an examination as a threat that could damage their grade point average, while another may view the same examination as a challenge to prove academic competence. These different interpretations lead to very different emotional reactions. A threat appraisal often results in worry, anxiety, and avoidance, while a challenge appraisal may motivate effort and persistence.

Basically Primary appraisal represents the individual's first judgment about whether an event has consequences for their personal well-being. Lazarus (1991) describes this process as one in which a person evaluates whether a situation is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. When an event is appraised as stressful, it is often classified into one of three categories: a threat, a loss, or a challenge. According to Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, and Gruen (1986), these appraisals are not just labels but are fundamental in shaping both the coping responses adopted and the emotional outcomes that follow stressful situations.

In the university, the appraisal process becomes evident in how students approach examinations. For instance, a student may interpret an upcoming test as a threat if they fear failure, as a loss if they are reflecting on a history of repeated poor performance, or as a challenge if they view it as an opportunity to demonstrate academic competence. Building on this, Peacock and Wong (1990)

proposed a multidimensional model for assessing stress appraisal, emphasizing that primary appraisal is closely tied to the perceived significance of an event for one's well-being. Their framework highlights dimensions such as threat, challenge, and centrality, illustrating that the meaning students attach to academic tasks plays a crucial role in determining whether examination stress functions as a motivating force or becomes debilitating.

Peacock and Wong (1990) advanced the understanding of this process by developing a multidimensional approach to measure stress appraisal. They argued that primary appraisal does not only capture whether an event is threatening but also reflects broader dimensions such as centrality (the degree to which the event is important to one's well-being), threat, and challenge. This framework is highly applicable to examination contexts, since for many university students, academic performance is strongly tied to self-worth, parental expectations, and future career aspirations. Thus, examinations carry high centrality, making the appraisal process particularly impactful.

Furthermore, contemporary studies have reinforced the importance of primary appraisal in predicting academic stress outcomes. For instance, Schutz and Davis (2000) note that students who perceive exams as challenges are more likely to report higher levels of motivation and persistence, whereas those who appraise them as threats often exhibit higher test anxiety and reduced performance. Similarly, Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) found that students who engage in positive appraisal and proactive coping strategies tend to achieve better academic results, even under stressful conditions. This highlights the fact that the meaning students attach to examinations is not just an intellectual evaluation but a determinant of both psychological well-being and academic success.

Examinations often serve as the primary mode of academic evaluation at the university. High-stakes exams, limited continuous assessment, and intense competition among students create conditions in which tests are easily appraised as threats or losses. Many students experience pressure not only from the academic system but also from socio-economic factors, such as family expectations and limited job opportunities. When examinations are framed primarily as threats, students may experience debilitating levels of stress that impair learning and recall during test situations (Aremu & Oluwole, 2001). However, when reappraised as challenges,

examinations may serve as motivational platforms, driving students to engage in constructive study habits and resilience

While primary appraisal involves determining whether an event is threatening, challenging, or irrelevant, secondary appraisal refers to the individual's evaluation of their coping resources and options for dealing with the situation. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), secondary appraisal is the process through which individuals assess what can be done to prevent harm, reduce threat, or enhance the benefits of a potentially stressful event. In other words, while primary appraisal answers the question "Am I in trouble?", secondary appraisal addresses "What can I do about it?"

In university examinations, secondary appraisal becomes particularly significant. During this stage, students evaluate their internal and external resources to determine whether they are capable of handling the demands of the test. Internally, they may consider whether they have studied sufficiently, retained key concepts, or developed effective test-taking strategies. Externally, they may reflect on whether they have enough time to revise, access to study materials, supportive peers, helpful lecturers, or encouragement from family members. As Folkman (2010) explains, the adequacy of these perceived resources strongly influences whether stress will be manageable or overwhelming.

When students believe they have adequate coping resources—such as strong academic preparation, effective time management, problem-solving skills, and confidence in their abilities—they are less likely to experience debilitating stress. In fact, such appraisals often transform examinations from threatening experiences into opportunities for growth. Research by Zeidner (1995) indicates that students with high academic self-efficacy, who trust in their ability to cope with examination demands, tend to display lower test anxiety and better performance outcomes. Similarly, Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) found that students who rely on adaptive coping resources such as planning, persistence, and social support are more likely to achieve academic success even under stressful conditions.

In reverse, when students perceive their coping resources as inadequate, examinations are appraised as unmanageable stressors. In such cases, stress can become overwhelming, interfering with concentration, memory, and problem-solving. Misra and McKean (2000) argue that students who lack effective coping strategies such as time management skills or social support networks

are more prone to academic burnout, heightened anxiety, and reduced performance. This is especially true in competitive academic contexts like Nigerian universities, where examinations often carry high stakes, with limited opportunities for continuous assessment. Students who feel underprepared or unsupported in these environments may appraise exams as insurmountable, leading to avoidance behaviors such as procrastination or withdrawal from academic tasks.

Bandura (1997) emphasizes the role of self-efficacy the belief in one's ability to mobilize resources effectively as a decisive factor in stress responses. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to interpret examinations as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy are prone to heightened anxiety and a sense of helplessness, which can negatively affect performance outcomes.

Social support also plays a crucial role in secondary appraisal. Cohen and Wills (1985) highlight that supportive networks from family, peers, and mentors can buffer the effects of stress by increasing students' perceived coping resources. Within the examination context, encouragement from friends, guidance from lecturers, and emotional support from family can help students feel more capable of meeting academic demands. Additionally, Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy emphasizes that confidence in one's coping ability can be a decisive factor in shaping stress responses. When students believe they can mobilize resources effectively, they are less likely to interpret examinations as overwhelming threats

Also Cultural and institutional factors further influence secondary appraisal in Nigerian universities. Large class sizes, limited access to learning materials, and infrastructural challenges can shape students' perception of their coping resources. For instance, in universities where library facilities are limited or lecture materials are inconsistent, students may perceive their resources as insufficient, leading to heightened examination-related stress (Obemeata, 2003; Okonkwo & Okonkwo, 2015). Conversely, institutions that provide comprehensive academic support services, such as counseling centers, tutorial programs, and study workshops, can enhance students' perception of available resources, thereby reducing stress and promoting academic resilience (Adebayo, 2012; Ojo, 2018).

The interaction between secondary appraisal and coping strategies is also evident in the diverse adaptive behaviors students employ. Planning and time management are fundamental strategies that allow students to organize study sessions effectively, break down complex topics, and

allocate sufficient time for revision (Misra & McKean, 2000). Problem-solving skills enable students to approach challenging questions systematically without becoming overwhelmed (Zeidner, 1995). Emotional regulation strategies, including positive self-talk and mindfulness exercises, can mitigate anxiety and enhance concentration (Folkman, 2010). Social coping, through discussion with peers or guidance from lecturers, reinforces a sense of preparedness and shared academic experience (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Each of these strategies is evaluated and selected during secondary appraisal, reflecting students' assessment of what is feasible and effective given their perceived resources.

Additionally social and familial support systems are particularly significant. Encouragement from family members, guidance from lecturers, and collaboration with peers can serve as buffers against stress by enhancing students' confidence and sense of control (Okoye, 2011; Onwuka & Adedoyin, 2017). Students who perceive strong social support are more likely to approach examinations as manageable challenges rather than overwhelming threats, highlighting the combined influence of individual and environmental resources in secondary appraisal (Bandura, 1997; Cohen & Wills, 1985)

In conclusion, Lazarus and Folkman's theory provides a clear explanation for the differing effects of examination stress among university students. In some cases, examinations are perceived as insurmountable threats that compromise concentration, hinder memory recall, and decrease overall performance (Zeidner, 1998). In contrast, other students interpret the same assessments as challenges that heighten motivation, sharpen focus, and improve results. Evidence from Hembree (1988) indicates that individuals with elevated test anxiety frequently underperform relative to their actual abilities, emphasizing the importance of appraisal and coping mechanisms in determining academic outcomes. Research by Putwain (2007) further supports this notion, revealing that students' perceptions of classroom assessments significantly predict both their test anxiety and academic achievement. More recent findings by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) highlight examinations as a primary source of stress, while demonstrating that coping strategies strongly influence whether this stress exerts negative or facilitative effects.

Several empirical investigations reinforce the relevance of this theoretical framework in educational settings. Hembree's (1988) meta-analysis showed that interventions aimed at enhancing coping skills can alleviate test anxiety and boost academic performance. Similarly,

Zeidner (1998) observed that students who evaluate examinations as threatening exhibit higher anxiety and poorer outcomes, whereas those perceiving assessments as manageable challenges demonstrate greater confidence and effectiveness. Mahmoud, Mohamed, and Mostafa (2017) found comparable results among nursing students, indicating that the ability to deploy coping strategies directly shapes stress responses during clinical practice. Beyond student populations, scholars such as Pyles (2016) have applied this model to broader educational contexts, demonstrating that individuals' appraisal of challenging situations dictates their behavioral responses. In university settings, students' evaluation of examinations as either threats or opportunities ultimately determines whether stress undermines performance or serves as a catalyst for preparation, focus, and academic success. Thus, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a strong theoretical lens for this study, as it directly connects students' cognitive appraisal of exams with their stress levels, coping mechanisms, and academic outcomes.

2.5.2 Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome, (1936)

Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory provides a physiological perspective on how individuals respond to prolonged stress. First introduced in the 1930s, Selye (1936, 1976) proposed that the human body reacts to stressors through a predictable three-stage process: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. The alarm stage is triggered immediately when an individual perceives a stressor, activating the body's "fight-or-flight" response, which includes increased heart rate, elevated cortisol levels, and heightened alertness. For students facing examinations, this initial reaction manifests as tension, rapid heartbeat, sweating, or heightened mental alertness. While short-term activation may sharpen focus, excessive or frequent alarms can create anxiety, disrupt concentration, and impair recall (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, and Heim, 2009)

Following the alarm stage, the resistance stage occurs as the body mobilizes resources to cope with the ongoing stressor. At this point, physiological processes stabilize, and adaptive behaviors are employed to manage demands. For examination scenarios, students may engage in structured study routines, seek guidance from instructors, or collaborate with peers to prepare effectively. This stage reflects the body and mind's ability to resist adverse outcomes, maintain functionality,

and optimize performance under pressure (Sapolsky, 1998). Some other research suggests that students who successfully sustain adaptive responses during this stage are more likely to exhibit improved focus, effective time management, and enhanced academic achievement (Misra and McKean, 2000)

Next is the exhaustion stage, individuals enter the exhaustion stage, where physiological and psychological resources are depleted if examination stress still persist. At this point, prolonged exposure to stress can lead to fatigue, chronic anxiety, weakened immune response, and diminished cognitive performance (McEwen, 2007). Students who fail to manage study demands or encounter repeated examination pressure without adequate support may experience burnout, memory lapses, or decreased motivation, ultimately affecting performance outcomes (Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). Evidence from research among undergraduates demonstrates a clear relationship between sustained examination stress and heightened cortisol levels, impaired problem-solving abilities, and poor academic results (Zeidner, 1998).

Selye's framework has been widely applied in educational psychology to explain why stress produces diverse outcomes among students. While some learners navigate examination periods successfully by maintaining adaptive physiological and behavioral responses, others succumb to exhaustion, revealing the interplay between individual coping capacity, environmental demands, and sustained stress exposure (Fink, 2000). Additional studies highlight the moderating role of coping strategies, social support, and personal resilience in mitigating the negative effects of stress on cognitive and emotional functioning (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). For example, interventions that incorporate relaxation techniques, time management training, and peer-assisted learning have been shown to reduce physiological arousal and improve academic outcomes, consistent with the resistance stage of GAS (Deffenbacher, Starkes, and Learned, 2004; Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, and Lennie, 2012).

Moreover, GAS provides an explanatory lens for understanding cumulative stress effects in academic settings. Unlike models that focus solely on perception or appraisal, GAS emphasizes the biological consequences of prolonged stress, offering insights into how chronic examination pressure can impair health and learning outcomes. This perspective is particularly valuable when examining high-stakes examinations, where repeated activation of the alarm stage without effective coping strategies can accelerate progression to exhaustion, leading to sustained

cognitive and emotional impairment (Sapolsky, 2004). By integrating GAS with cognitive appraisal models, researchers can capture both the subjective experience of stress and its physiological ramifications, providing a holistic framework for understanding examination-related challenges among university students.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study will adopt a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data directly from respondents through questionnaires and interviews in order to describe their experiences, opinions, and coping strategies concerning examination stress. A survey design also makes it possible to reach a relatively large group of people within a limited time frame.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this Research constitutes of all undergraduate students residing in Hall 3 residence of the University of Benin, Benin City. This group will be chosen because students in the hostels often face academic, personal, and social pressures that can contribute to examination stress.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

From the entire population, a sample will be drawn to represent different levels and faculties. A simple random sampling technique will be employed to give all students an equal chance of being selected, while ensuring that both male and female students were represented since the hostel is mixed-gender. The accessible nature of the hostel will make it convenient for the researcher to approach respondents within the time available for the study.

3.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument used for this study is a structured questionnaire. It is designed to obtain relevant information from respondents on “The Effect of Examination Stress on Students of the University of Benin.” The questionnaire is divided into six (6) main sections (A–F), each addressing a particular aspect of the research objectives.

Section A covers the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, level, and marital status. Section B focuses on the causes of examination stress among students, while Section C examines its effects on academic performance. Section D explores the

psychological and emotional impact of examination stress, and Section E highlights the coping strategies adopted by students. Finally, Section F seeks information on institutional support systems and students' suggestions for managing examination stress effectively.

The questions are written in clear and simple language to ensure proper understanding and accurate responses. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions are included to collect detailed and quantifiable data. The questionnaires will be personally administered by the researcher to selected students of the University of Benin to ensure a high rate of response and data accuracy.

3.5 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire will be reviewed by experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling. Their suggestions and corrections will be incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and coverage of the questions.

3.6 Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument will be established through a pilot test carried out among a small group of students not included in the main study. The responses will be analyzed, and necessary adjustments will be made to ensure that the instrument produces consistent results.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The researcher will personally distribute and collect the questionnaires within the hostel. This approach will be chosen to reduce the problem of low response rate and to encourage students to participate. Respondents will be assured of confidentiality and informed that the information provided would be used strictly for academic purposes.

3.8 Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

The responses that will be obtained from the respondents through the administered questionnaires will be carefully collected, organized, and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive statistics will be employed to provide a clear and concise summary of the data gathered from the field. This will involve the use of tables constructed with rows and columns to present the data in a systematic and easily interpretable form. Each table will display the variables, the response options, their corresponding frequencies, and the percentage distribution of responses. This method of presentation will ensure clarity and

facilitate easy comparison among the different variables investigated in the study. The study will adopt the use of simple percentage as the main descriptive statistical tool to analyze the data. Simple percentage is a method used to compare two or more sets of data by expressing the frequency of responses as a proportion of the total number of respondents. It is particularly useful in determining the relative importance of each response category and in revealing trends and patterns among the data collected. The formula that will be used for the computation of simple percentage is given as:

Number Of Respondent

X 100

Total Number Of Respondent

Percentage (%) =

or more generally expressed as:

X 100

f

N

P =

Where P represents the percentage, f represents the frequency of each response, and N represents the total number of respondents, while 100 is the constant used to convert the fraction to a percentage. This statistical method will be considered appropriate for the study since it provides a straightforward way to describe and interpret the characteristics of the data collected on examination stress among students.

In addition to the descriptive analysis, the Chi-square (χ^2) statistical technique will also be employed to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. The Chi-square test will be used to determine whether there exists a significant relationship between the independent variable, which is examination stress, and the dependent variable, which is the academic performance of students.

The test will be necessary to confirm whether the differences observed in the data occur by chance or are statistically significant. The formula for calculating Chi-square is given as:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

where O denotes the observed frequency, E denotes the expected frequency, and the summation symbol (Σ) indicates that the calculation will be carried out over all response categories. The Chi-square test will therefore enable the researcher to verify the validity of the stated hypotheses and to establish the extent to which examination stress influences students' academic performance at the University of Benin.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data obtained from the administered questionnaires. The purpose is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the responses gathered from students on the topic *"The Effect of Examination Stress on Students of the University of Benin."* A total of one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to students within the Faculty of Social Sciences, all of which were duly completed and returned, representing a 100% response rate. The data collected were systematically organized, coded, and analyzed using frequency distributions and simple percentages to ensure clarity and ease of interpretation.

The presentation and analysis in this chapter are structured in line with the major sections of the questionnaire, which include: the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, the causes and nature of examination stress, the effects of examination stress on academic performance and well-being, the coping strategies adopted by students, and the institutional support systems available to assist students in managing stress.

Each section of the analysis is presented in tabular form, followed by a detailed interpretation and discussion of findings. The results presented in this chapter serve as the empirical basis upon which the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations in Chapter Five are built.

4.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Range	15–19 years	18	18%
	20–24 years	56	56%
	25–29 years	20	20%
	30 and above	6	6%
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
Religion	Christian	82	82%
	Muslim	13	13%
	Others	5	5%
Level of Study	100 Level	10	10%
	200 Level	25	25%
	300 Level	28	28%
	400 Level	37	37%
Marital Status	Single	91	91%
	Married	6	6%
	Others	3	3%

Interpretation:

The table above reveals that the majority of respondents (56%) fall within the age bracket of 20–24 years, indicating that most of the participants are young adults typical of undergraduate students. The gender distribution shows an equal representation of males and females (50% each), ensuring balance in the responses. A large proportion of the respondents (82%) identified as Christians, while 13% were Muslims and 5% belonged to other religions. Most respondents were single (91%), while only a few were married (6%). Furthermore, the highest representation came from 400-level students (37%), which aligns with the target population of this research.

4.3 CAUSES AND NATURE OF EXAMINATION STRESS

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequency of stress during examination periods	Rarely	6	6%

	Sometimes	21	21%
	Often	43	43%
	Always	30	30%
Main cause of examination stress	Poor preparation	24	24%
	Fear of failure	27	27%
	Academic workload	30	30%
	Parental/social pressure	12	12%
	Financial challenges	7	7%
Experience of anxiety or tension before/during examinations	Yes	85	85%
	No	10	10%
	Undecided	5	5%
Competition among classmates contributes to stress	Yes	68	68%
	No	18	18%
	Undecided	14	14%
Method of examination affects level of stress	Yes	77	77%
	No	15	15%
	Undecided	8	8%

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that a significant majority of students (43%) often experience stress during examination periods, while 30% always do. The leading causes of stress identified were academic workload (30%), fear of failure (27%), and poor preparation (24%). Furthermore, 85% of the respondents admitted to feeling anxiety or tension before or during examinations. Competition among classmates was also recognized as a major contributing factor by 68% of respondents, while 77% agreed that the type or method of examination influences their level of stress. This implies that both academic and environmental factors contribute significantly to examination stress among students.

4.4 EFFECTS OF EXAMINATION STRESS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND WELL-BEING

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Difficulty concentrating while studying	Yes	83	83%
	No	11	11%
	Undecided	6	6%
Performed below expectation due to stress	Yes	76	76%
	No	15	15%
	Undecided	9	9%
Stress affects sleeping pattern or health	Yes	81	81%
	No	12	12%
	Undecided	7	7%
Stress affects motivation to study or attend lectures	Yes	70	70%
	No	18	18%
	Undecided	12	12%
Stress influences overall academic performance	Yes	86	86%
	No	8	8%
	Undecided	6	6%

Interpretation:

The results reveal that examination stress has a noticeable negative impact on students' academic performance and general well-being. A large proportion (83%) reported difficulty concentrating while studying, while 76% stated they had performed below expectation due to stress. Similarly, 81% admitted that stress affects their sleeping pattern and overall health. Moreover, 70% acknowledged that it reduces their motivation to study or attend lectures, while 86% agreed that it influences their overall academic performance. These findings demonstrate that examination stress not only impairs students' cognitive performance but also affects their physical and emotional health.

4.5 COPING STRATEGIES AND ADAPTIVE RESPONSES

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Main coping strategy	Studying with friends	29	29%
	Listening to music	22	22%
	Sleeping or resting	17	17%
	Religious activities	15	15%
	Exercise	10	10%
	Substance use	4	4%
	Others	3	3%
Planning study schedule early	Yes	53	53%
	No	27	27%
	Sometimes	20	20%
Effectiveness of coping strategies	Very effective	19	19%
	Effective	46	46%
	Less effective	27	27%
	Not effective	8	8%
Seek emotional or academic support	Yes	58	58%
	No	19	19%
	Sometimes	23	23%

Interpretation:

The table shows that students employ various coping mechanisms to manage examination stress. The most common strategies include studying with friends (29%) and listening to music (22%), while a smaller proportion resort to resting or sleeping (17%) and religious activities (15%). Over half of the respondents (53%) reported that they plan their study schedules early to minimize pressure. About 65% of students rated their coping methods as either effective or very effective. Additionally, 58% indicated that they seek emotional or academic support from peers, lecturers, or counselors during examination periods. These findings suggest that students rely heavily on social and personal coping strategies to manage stress.

4.6 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND INTERVENTIONS

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Awareness of institutional support services	Yes	41	41%
	No	59	59%
Accessed or benefited from support services	Yes	23	23%
	No	45	45%
	Not aware	32	32%
Availability of stress management resources	Very adequate	5	5%
	Adequate	21	21%
	Inadequate	47	47%
	Very inadequate	27	27%
Concern shown by lecturers and management	Yes	35	35%
	No	46	46%
	Undecided	19	19%

Interpretation:

The results indicate that the majority of respondents (59%) are not aware of any institutional support services for students experiencing stress. Only 23% have ever accessed or benefited from such programs. In addition, 74% of the respondents rated the availability of stress management resources as inadequate or very inadequate. Furthermore, 46% believe that lecturers and faculty management do not show sufficient concern for students' mental and emotional well-being during examinations. This finding highlights the need for the University of Benin to strengthen its support systems for students' psychological and academic welfare.

4.7 RECOMMENDATIONS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Variables	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Should the university implement programs to manage examination stress?	Yes	93	93%

	No	4	4%
	Undecided	3	3%
Most helpful ways to reduce examination stress	Counselling and guidance services	39	39%
	Better academic planning	27	27%
	Reduction in course load	19	19%
	Relaxation and wellness programs	13	13%
	Others	2	2%

Interpretation:

The findings show that a vast majority (93%) of respondents believe that the university should implement programs to help students manage examination stress. Counselling and guidance services were identified by 39% as the most effective means of reducing stress, followed by better academic planning (27%) and reduction in course load (19%). This suggests that students are highly receptive to institutional intervention and are aware of the potential benefits of structured stress management initiatives.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed summary, conclusion, and set of recommendations derived from the findings of this study. It revisits the key objectives of the research, highlights the major outcomes revealed in Chapter Four, and discusses the implications of these results for students and the university community as a whole.

The study was undertaken to examine *“The Effect of Examination Stress on Students of the University of Benin,”* with special attention to students within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The core objectives were to investigate the major causes and manifestations of examination stress, to assess its impact on students’ academic performance and psychological well-being, to explore the coping strategies employed by students, and to evaluate the institutional mechanisms available for addressing examination-related stress.

Information for the study was gathered using a well-structured questionnaire administered to one hundred (100) respondents drawn from different departments under the Faculty of Social Sciences. The data collected were systematically arranged, coded, and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency distributions to achieve clarity and precision.

This chapter, therefore, summarizes the major findings presented in Chapter Four, draws meaningful conclusions from the research outcomes, and proposes practical recommendations that can guide students, lecturers, university administrators, and policymakers in addressing the problem of examination stress. The recommendations are aimed at reducing the incidence of examination-induced anxiety and promoting a more supportive academic environment for optimal learning and performance.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The study investigated the causes, effects, and coping strategies of examination stress among students of the University of Benin. After careful analysis of data obtained from the field, several significant findings were made:

1. High Prevalence of Examination Stress:

The research revealed that most respondents frequently experience stress during examination periods. This indicates that examination stress is a widespread and recurring phenomenon among students in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

2. Principal Causes of Examination Stress:

The leading causes identified include poor preparation, fear of failure, heavy academic workload, and pressure from parents or society. Other minor factors such as financial difficulties and competition among peers also contributed to heightened stress levels.

3. Emotional and Psychological Effects:

Many respondents reported experiencing anxiety, tension, and restlessness prior to and during examinations. These symptoms often disrupt their concentration and self-confidence, making it difficult for them to perform at their best.

4. Impact on Academic Performance and General Health:

The study showed that examination stress negatively affects both the academic and physical well-being of students. Respondents indicated that stress frequently leads to sleeplessness, headaches, fatigue, loss of appetite, and in some cases, poor academic results due to inability to concentrate.

5. Coping Strategies Utilized by Students:

The most common coping mechanisms adopted include studying in groups, listening to music, engaging in prayer or other religious activities, sleeping or resting, and participating in physical exercise. However, a few students admitted to using unhealthy approaches such as consuming stimulants to stay awake, which can have long-term health consequences.

6. Institutional Support and Awareness:

Findings revealed that most respondents were unaware of existing institutional services such as counselling, mentorship, or student wellness programs. Only a small proportion had ever benefited from such services, suggesting a gap between institutional provision and student awareness.

7. Need for Institutional Intervention:

A majority of respondents strongly agreed that the university should design and implement structured programs and policies specifically aimed at reducing examination stress and promoting students' mental well-being.

5.3 Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is evident that examination stress is a serious and persistent challenge affecting the academic efficiency and psychological stability of students at the University of Benin. The study established that this problem arises mainly from factors such as

inadequate preparation, fear of poor performance, heavy academic workload, and external pressures from parents and peers.

Examination stress does not only affect students' academic achievements but also impacts their mental and physical health, leading to symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, insomnia, and loss of motivation. These conditions in turn reduce students' productivity and engagement in academic activities.

Although most students have developed personal strategies to cope with stress, many of these methods are short-term and ineffective in the long run. Furthermore, the research revealed that institutional support systems, such as counselling and wellness programs, are either insufficient or poorly publicized, resulting in low utilization by students who need them most.

Therefore, the study concludes that examination stress is an inevitable but manageable aspect of academic life. The university community must, however, adopt more proactive measures in addressing this issue by promoting effective stress management programs, creating awareness about mental health, and providing continuous guidance to students. Such initiatives will not only enhance academic performance but also foster emotional stability and overall student development.

5.4 Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of this research, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by students, lecturers, and the university management:

- 1. Improved Academic Planning and Study Habits:**

Students should be encouraged to cultivate better study habits and time management skills. The university should organize academic skills workshops and training sessions to help students prepare adequately ahead of examinations, thereby reducing last-minute anxiety and panic.

- 2. Strengthening Counselling and Guidance Units:**

The Student Affairs Division should strengthen existing counselling units and ensure that professional counsellors are available to attend to students' psychological and

emotional needs. Awareness campaigns should be conducted periodically to encourage students to utilize these services.

3. Establishment of Stress Management and Wellness Programs:

The university should implement structured stress management initiatives, such as wellness workshops, relaxation therapy, and mindfulness exercises. Recreational activities should also be encouraged as part of students' mental health routines.

4. Supportive Role of Lecturers and Faculty Members:

Lecturers should demonstrate greater sensitivity to students' mental health by maintaining reasonable workloads and flexible deadlines where possible. Departments should avoid clustering examinations or continuous assessments within short time frames.

5. Promotion of Peer Mentorship and Social Support:

Senior students and student associations should be encouraged to mentor their junior colleagues. Peer mentoring can help new students adapt better to the academic environment and share effective coping techniques.

6. Enhancement of Academic and Physical Learning Environments:

The university should improve classroom and library conditions to create a more conducive atmosphere for study. Availability of relaxation spaces, quiet zones, and reading areas will help students maintain balance during intensive study periods.

7. Awareness of Institutional Support Services:

The university management should ensure that information about available counselling, mentorship, and health services is clearly communicated to all students through orientations, posters, social media, and student handbooks.

8. Further Research:

Future studies should extend the investigation to other faculties and campuses of the University of Benin to compare levels of examination stress and coping patterns. This would help in formulating more comprehensive strategies to address the problem across the university system.

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APPENDIX
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

QUESTIONNAIRE

**THE EFFECT OF EXAMINATION STRESS ON STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF BENIN**

Dear Respondent, REQUEST FOR THE COMPLETION OF QUESTIONNAIRE, I am a 400-level student of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin, conducting a research study titled: “The Effect of Examination Stress on Students of the University of Benin.” This questionnaire is designed to obtain information relevant to the study. Your cooperation and sincere responses are highly valued. Please note that all information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes only. Thank you for your time and participation.

SECTION A: BIO-DATA

1. Age Range: 15–19 () 20–24 () 25–29 () 30 and above ()
2. Gender: Male () Female ()
3. Religion: Christian () Muslim () Others ()
4. Level of Study: 100 Level () 200 Level () 300 Level () 400 Level ()
5. Faculty: _____
6. Marital Status: Single () Married () Others ()

SECTION B: CAUSES AND NATURE OF EXAMINATION STRESS

1. How often do you experience stress during examination periods? Rarely () Sometimes () Often () Always ()
2. Which of the following do you consider the main cause of examination stress? Poor preparation () Fear of failure () Academic workload () Parental or social pressure () Financial challenges () Others (specify) _____
3. Do you usually experience anxiety or tension before or during examinations? Yes () No () Undecided ()
4. Has competition among classmates contributed to your examination stress? Yes () No () Undecided ()

5. Does the method of examination (e.g., essay, objective, continuous assessment) affect your level of stress? Yes () No () Undecided ()

SECTION C: EFFECTS OF EXAMINATION STRESS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND WELL-BEING

6. Has examination stress ever made it difficult for you to concentrate while studying? Yes () No () Undecided ()

7. Have you ever performed below expectation due to excessive examination stress? Yes () No () Undecided ()