

Anxiety and Students Performance: The Role of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in managing anxiety among students. Anxiety is a significant factor in poor academic performance, as it can block thoughts, create a negative frame of mind, and lead to panic and potentially poor exam performance. The modern educational system heavily relies on tests as a means of assessment, which can cause distress and threaten self-esteem and motivation. As many as 10 million students in elementary and secondary schools perform poorly due to anxiety, resulting in approximately 20% of school children and 25% of college students experiencing debilitating performance on tests. Test anxiety can hinder students' educational development, and this paper suggests that Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy should be effectively applied to address this anxiety to enhance school performance.

Keywords: Anxiety, Students, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, Performance

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a broad feeling of dread and apprehension about the future that has no specific cause, but exam anxiety is a more specific phenomenon in which a graded examination is the source of fear [1, 2]. Exam anxiety is a form of performance anxiety. In such conditions, a student may feel under pressure to do well and develop concerned about his ability to do so. Exam anxiety is also known as anticipatory anxiety, situational anxiety, and evaluation anxiety. The term "test anxiety" refers to "the set of phenomenological, psychological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situations" [3, 4, 5]. Exam anxiety is characterized by physiological overarousal, tension, and physical symptoms, as well as worry, dread, and fear of failing before or during exam settings [6, 7]. Although experts have stated that it is natural to feel anxious when studying for a test or examination, too much anxiety can impair kids' academic performance at school [8, 9]. Students who have test anxiety are easily distracted during a test, have difficulties understanding relatively easy instructions, and have difficulty organizing or memorizing key material. Excessive anxiety can cause thought blocks, a negative frame of mind, panic, and perhaps poor exam performance. While studying for an exam, many students suffer some level of stress. Appropriate degrees of stress can improve students' memory, attention, motivation, and exam performance [10, 11]. Test anxiety has frequently been linked to low academic performance in studies [12, 13]. Students feel pressured in a highly competitive scholastic environment to get the information and abilities to take multiple highly competitive examinations because obtained scores are critical for higher education and good employment. Such methods place significant strain on students [14, 15, 16]. As a result, the current 'do or die' competitive educational setting induces significant levels of stress and tension in students. As a result, the pressure on pupils to succeed increases anxiety, which affects the individual's academic, occupational, and emotional status. According to [17, 18], "the era we live in is a test-conscious age in which the lives of many people are not only greatly influenced, but are also determined by their test performance. Exam anxiety and stress are thought to prevent certain students from realizing their academic potential. Students typically see assessment as a cause of increased anxiety and a circumstance fraught with uncertainty/unfairness in allowing them to exhibit their genuine abilities [19]. Such feelings in students limit their potential performance during a test circumstance, resulting in increased test anxiety [20], which directly leads to a decline in student achievement. The secondary level is a watershed moment in any student's academic

career. During this time, students enter adolescence, go through significant physical and mental changes, and make important decisions about their future careers. They are also concerned about their academic performance. Parents also put pressure on their children to achieve excellent grades so that they can gain admission to famous and reputable institutes. Their worry and stress are heightened by the entrance preparation and, in many cases, enormous parental expectations [21]. A strong academic record is necessary to achieve success in the future. As a result, students often experience stress and strain during their senior years and remain anxious. Anxiety causes even seemingly well-adjusted students to feel insecure about their future. According to research, many factors such as family socioeconomic position, school factors, and social support all have an impact on academic success. These elements have a substantial impact on students' academic achievement, but demographic characteristics such as gender and location of the learners are also important. Understanding the factors that contribute to academic stress in students is required to assist them in resolving their issues. Against this context, this study investigates the role of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in the treatment of anxiety in students.

Conceptual Literature

Anxiety

Anxiety is a phenomenon that many people experience on a regular basis. Anxiety is defined as the tense, disturbing anticipation of a frightening but ambiguous event; a state of uneasiness [22]. Because of the nature of anxiety, researchers have classified it into many sub-categories (for example, language anxiety, speech anxiety, and social anxiety). This paper focuses on one of these types, namely exam anxiety. Since the 1950s, there has been a lot of discussion about test anxiety. It is seen as a prevalent educational issue, referring to a condition in which pupils lack confidence in their abilities, which is shown particularly in their performance and test scores. This viewpoint is confirmed by research conducted with college students by [23], which indicated that although only 8 out of 138 low-anxiety students dropped out of college due to academic failure, 26 out of 129 high anxious students dropped out for the same reason. Test anxiety, according to [6], is a collection of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative repercussions or failure on an exam or comparable evaluative setting. According to Zeidner, exam anxiety is strongly tied to failure repercussions. This connection can be observed even when the individual is not in or anticipating an evaluation setting, as the extremely test anxious individual may not be concerned with the possibility of failure, embarrassment, or social rejection. However, in evaluation settings, these options become active. Students who experience test anxiety may not necessarily lack intelligence or motivation. Test anxiety and other anxiety-related deficiencies impair academic performance [24]. To illustrate how test anxiety affects student performance, consider the [25] study. The replies of students to Sarason and Mandler's Questionnaire [26] were evaluated by these researchers. The findings revealed that test anxiety has two significant components. The first component was emotionality, which was associated to physical reactions to exam settings such as anxiousness, perspiration, persistent clock-watching, pencil-taping, and so on. Worry, which is the psychological or cognitive part of test anxiety, was the second factor. [25] define worry as "primarily cognitive concern(s) about the consequences of failure." This is not surprising given that a teacher or instructor cannot see a student's test anxiousness. Furthermore, pupils' actual levels of test anxiety cannot be assessed or analyzed directly. The only thing that could be detected was the pupils' manifestation of test anxiety in the form of the previously indicated emotional responses. In a group of high school students, [25] discovered that worry had a stronger negative association with performance results than emotionality. This implies that cognitions or thoughts about the evaluation situation will have the greatest impact on performance under such circumstances.

Given that test anxiety can have a variety of causes, a great deal of research has been undertaken to determine how it impacts performance. According to one assessment of test anxiety studies, various possibilities have been investigated. Some studies, for example, have found that pupils' lack of preparation is at the foundation of test anxiety. According to these research, certain students ineffectively organize or process information, and as a result, they do poorly on tests. According to [27], extremely test-nervous students have difficulty arranging content to be studied when compared to less anxious students. According to multiple research findings, highly test worried pupils have less effective study habits than their less anxious counterparts [12]. This viewpoint is backed by [28], who claims that a lack of efficient study skills relates to poor performance under evaluative situations, which in turn leads to increased anxiety when performing in subsequent examinations. Treatment studies that focused on assisting students in improving their study abilities provided support for this research. According to the findings of these studies, study techniques can also aid to minimize test anxiety and boost performance. It is worth noting that [6] believes that test anxiety cannot be explained away by a lack of work or exam achievement, as diligent and highly motivated students also suffer from its crippling effects. He claims that academic performance is influenced by information processing routines that directly control learning and comprehension of classroom material, such as focused attention, working memory, and long-term memory retrieval, all of which can be influenced by personality factors such as test anxiety.

Other studies have found that "the habitual, irrelevant, negative thoughts that some students have during a testing situation" [29] are a key source of anxiety. According to [29], there are three types of test-averse students. Among them are students who:

- Lack adequate study and test-preparation procedures, are aware of this shortcoming, are aware that they are not well prepared for testing scenarios, and are concerned.
- Have appropriate methods in their arsenal and employ them, yet become sidetracked during tests.
- Believing they have enough methods; people perform poorly on examinations and wonder why.

Sarason, [30] believes that other elements that cause learners to be concerned are their capacity, task difficulty, the dread of receiving poor grades, and a lack of test preparation. Similarly, students who are anxious have less control over their focus. He also claims that there is substantial evidence that evaluational pressures negatively affect the performance of extremely test nervous individuals on complex activities. The weaker this influence is, the simpler the task. [31] appear to agree on the difficulties of the task. According to the findings of their study, high-anxious participants did better than low-anxious subjects on easy tasks but performed worse than low-anxious subjects on difficult tasks. This is corroborated by [6] study, which discovered that test anxiety is more damaging to challenging tasks. According to the test anxiety literature, test validity, time limit, test procedures, test structure, length, testing setting, and clarity of test instructions are some of the elements that influence students' reactions to tests [32]. Concerning the significance of test validity, [32] study found that students experience anxiety if the test includes content that was not covered in class. The time limit is another factor that contributes to exam anxiety and affects performance. According to [33], students were sometimes under pressure to systematize their ideas in a short amount of time. Inappropriate test procedure is another element that has a detrimental impact on student performance. [32] discovered that students felt apprehensive after studying for hours for a test and then finding question types in the test that they had no experience with. Finally, [33] study found that the majority of study participants confessed that they worried taking tests because test-taking conditions made them frightened of the negative implications of earning a bad score. Many studies have discovered this conclusion. Furthermore, research shows that worry has a negative impact on performance not only in school but also at the university level. [34] investigated the effect of anxiety by administering a traditional assessment on their course to a group of first-year female students. The pupils were aware that the results of this test will factor into their overall grade. They were immediately requested to complete a test anxiety questionnaire and were handed a parallel form of the prior examination, but this time it was stressed that the marks would not be counted towards their grade. When the data was analyzed, it was shown that extremely worried students fared better on the non-stressful exam, whereas low-anxiety students performed better in the typical condition. It is sometimes the type of test that causes test anxiety. Some students grow apprehensive during exams that ask them to demonstrate their knowledge in methods that they are unfamiliar with. Some students, for example, fear when they learn they must take essay assessments. Others grow nervous before oral exams. Various forms of assessments might cause anxiety in kids [35]. When and how test anxiety interacts with test performance is a point of contention among researchers. It interferes with either testing or studying. According to [36], test worried people divide their attention between task-relevant activities and concern with anxiety and self-criticism. Their performance suffers since they have less attention available for task-directed activities.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is an active, directive, solution-oriented therapy that focuses on helping clients resolve emotional, cognitive, and behavioral issues. It was created in 1962 by Dr. Albert Ellis, an American Psychologist. REBT involves rewiring people's belief patterns from negative to positive. The goal of REBT is to eradicate unrealistic and unreasonable self-defeating beliefs. REBT involves assisting people in thinking positively rather than negatively. Positive thinking is a helpful method to utilize while trying to lessen anxiety. That is, good thoughts should be used to replace negative thoughts, concepts, and beliefs [37]. The therapist is solely responsible for this. The REBT focuses on how to alter and change people's illogical ideas into more rational ones. According to [38], REBT is concerned with cognition, behavior, and action, which translates to thinking, judging, determining, analyzing, and acting. REBT is a general school of psychotherapy that aims to provide clients the tools they need to change their irrational behavior. Adolescent anxiety feelings, according to [38], are a result of their beliefs, evaluation, interpretation, and reaction to examination scenarios. He notices that clients (adolescents) are helped to obtain abilities that allow them to detect and challenge erroneous beliefs that have been learned and perpetuated through self-indoctrination. It also aids in the replacement of inefficient thought patterns with rational and effective cognition. His thesis holds that everyone has illogical views and is aware of them, but for one reason or another, they continue to hold these beliefs despite the consequences. People dogmatically adhere to irrational ideals and personal philosophies; these irrational ideals cause great distress and misery; these ideals can be reduced to a few basic categories; therapists can easily find these irrational categories in their clients' reasoning; and therapists can successfully teach clients how to give up their misery-causing irrational

beliefs [39]. People were concerned by things, according to Ellis, but it was their extreme view of those things that genuinely disturbed them [40].

Techniques of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy

The 'ABCDE' paradigm is taught to the client as the main strategy in rational emotive behavior therapy. Ellis created this technique in the aim that it would show clients the connection between their feelings, behaviors, and beliefs [41]. The 'ABCDE' paradigm is a five-step process for dealing with irrational thoughts. The actualizing event, denoted by the letter 'A,' can be an actual event, an inferred event, an external event, or an internal event. The belief, or 'B,' is classified into two types: irrational and harmful and reasonable and healthy. Healthy beliefs are those that are adaptable, rational, true, and mostly productive. These beliefs can take four different forms, four of which are beneficial; a preference, anti-awfulizing, high frustration tolerance, and accepting beliefs are all healthy; conversely, demanding, awfulizing, low frustration tolerance, and deprecating beliefs are all problematic. The consequences, 'C,' are either emotional or behavioral; emotions might be healthy, rational negative emotions or unhealthy, irrational negative emotions. For example, depression is an unhealthy negative feeling, whereas sadness is a healthy negative emotion. Someone who is upset, experiencing a negative mood, and is prone to or has a tendency to pout is an example of a behavioral consequence. The primary purpose of REBT is to persuade the client to question their illogical beliefs, 'D.' This procedure is extremely complicated and involves a number of steps. These steps are as follows, with explanations: Clients must distinguish between irrational beliefs and rational alternatives to these beliefs; clients must fully understand the unhealthy consequences (emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive) of their unhealthy beliefs; clients must fully understand that the rational alternatives to their irrational beliefs will yield healthier outcomes than their irrational beliefs; clients must understand that their irrational beliefs are false, illogical, and unproductive. The final part of the 'ABCDE' strategy is the 'E,' or effective new philosophy. Clients can advance to this level of the model only if they strengthen their rational beliefs, weaken their illogical beliefs, and integrate their reasonable ideas into their belief system, resulting in a healthier person [41]. There are three sorts of REBT approaches: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The modern educational system heavily relies on tests for assessment and evaluation, but this can cause distress for some students who experience negative experiences and struggle to reach their potentials. This can lead to a decrease in self-esteem and motivation, and students who repeatedly experience test failure or low performance often feel ashamed and incompetent. As many as 10 million students in elementary and secondary schools perform poorly due to anxiety, affecting around 20% of school children and 25% of college students. Test anxiety can hinder students' educational development, and Reactive Behavior Therapy (REBT) should be effectively applied to address this anxiety to enhance school performance.

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