



Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety Among Undergraduate in Public Universities in Delta State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities. Two research questions and two hypotheses were developed and tested. The study employed a correlational ex-post facto research design. The population of study consists 30,052 undergraduates from Delta State's public universities. One thousand undergraduates were selected through systematic sampling. The Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety Questionnaire (EIEAQ) was used. The instrument was given to 50 undergraduates from outside the study area; factor analysis determined construct and content validity. Validity was also evaluated by three experts from the Department of Guidance and Counseling. EIEAQ reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.892 and 0.869 for the Examination Anxiety scale respectively. With the assistance of three research assistants, the questionnaire was distributed directly to subjects in sampled institutions. Data were analysed using Pearson r correlation and regression. Each hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 significance level. Findings: (i) undergraduates possess a high level of emotional intelligence; (ii) emotional intelligence and examination anxiety have a positive relationship; (iii) gender has a positive moderating impact on this relationship. The study concludes that emotional intelligence significantly determines examination anxiety levels. Based on findings, it is recommended that emotional intelligence development programmes be integrated into counselling services and student support initiatives to help undergraduates manage stress and regulate their emotions.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Examination Anxiety, sex, Public Universities

INTRODUCTION

The university environment is a dynamic and multifaceted setting that significantly influences the experiences, behaviours, and outcomes of students. It is a microcosm of society comprising individuals from diverse cultural, social, and academic backgrounds. The environment includes physical structures such as lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, hostels, and recreational centres, as well as administrative and social systems that regulate interactions among students, lecturers, and university authorities (Putwain *et al*, 2018). Within public universities in Delta State, students are exposed to rigorous academic expectations, financial responsibilities, and social adjustments that collectively shape their academic and psychological well-being. These institutions operate within competitive academic systems where performance is continuously evaluated through tests, assignments, presentations, and semester examinations, thereby placing considerable demands on undergraduates (Gierl & Rogers, 2022). The university system itself presents several stress-inducing conditions capable of triggering psychological strain among students. High tuition and associated school charges, accommodation expenses, transportation costs, and the general economic realities facing many Nigerian families often create financial pressure on students. Many undergraduates struggle to combine academic activities with part-time work or entrepreneurial engagements to meet these expenses. In addition, students are frequently confronted with unannounced assignments, tight submission deadlines, continuous assessments, and intensive examination schedules. Social distractions such as peer influence, social media engagement, campus activities, and adjustment to independent living further complicate effective academic preparation. These cumulative pressures often reduce students' coping capacity and may culminate in heightened emotional distress, particularly examination anxiety (Akinsola & Nwajei, 2022).

Examination anxiety has therefore emerged as one of the most prevalent psychological challenges experienced by university students. Examination anxiety refers to excessive fear, tension, apprehension, or nervousness experienced before, during, or after evaluative academic situations. According to Zeidner (2018), examination anxiety is a multidimensional construct involving cognitive worry, emotional tension, physiological arousal, and behavioural reactions associated with fear of failure. Similarly, Putwain and Daly (2019) described examination anxiety as a maladaptive emotional response that interferes with concentration, memory recall, and academic performance. Research by Thomas, Cassady, and Finch (2018) further revealed that students experiencing high anxiety levels often demonstrate reduced working memory efficiency, resulting in poor examination outcomes despite adequate preparation. The effects of examination anxiety among undergraduates extend beyond academic performance to serious health consequences. During examination periods, many students report symptoms such as insomnia, headaches, fatigue, and loss of appetite, rapid heartbeat, excessive sweating, and panic attacks. Studies by Rana and Mahmood (2021) indicated that prolonged examination stress might weaken immune functioning and increase susceptibility to illness. In Nigerian universities, health centres frequently record increased student visits during examination periods due to stress-related complaints, anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion. Severe cases have reportedly resulted in hospitalization arising from hypertension episodes, anxiety-induced asthma attacks, and psychological breakdowns. These realities highlight examination anxiety as not merely an academic concern but a significant public health issue among undergraduates.

Educational psychologists have extensively examined examination anxiety from different theoretical perspectives. Spielberger's anxiety theory emphasized that evaluative situations activate emotional arousal capable of impairing performance when excessive. Cassady and Johnson (2019) identified cognitive worry as the strongest predictor of performance decline during examinations. Gierl and Rogers (2022) noted that anxious students often experience "mental block," characterized by inability to recall previously learned information. Furthermore, Owolabi (2020) reported that examination anxiety among Nigerian undergraduates is strongly associated with fear of academic failure and parental expectations. Similarly, Pekrun's control-value theory explained that students' emotional reactions depend largely on their perceived control over academic outcomes (Pekrun, 2021). Collectively, these authorities agree that examination anxiety is pervasive within higher education and requires psychological coping mechanisms for effective management. One important psychological resource that may influence examination anxiety is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and appropriately express emotions in oneself and others. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2019) conceptualized emotional intelligence as involving emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and adaptive coping skills. Students with high emotional intelligence are better able to manage stress, remain calm during examinations, and maintain positive academic motivation. Research by MacCann et al. (2020) demonstrated that emotionally intelligent students exhibit lower levels of academic stress and anxiety because they employ adaptive coping strategies such as problem-focused planning and emotional regulation. Likewise, Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2022) found a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among Nigerian university students, suggesting that higher emotional intelligence reduces fear and tension associated with examinations.

Another important moderating variable in examination anxiety is sex. Sex refers to biological differences between male and female students, which may influence emotional expression, coping behaviour, and stress responses. Empirical studies have consistently shown variations in anxiety levels between males and females. For instance, Chapell et al. (2020) reported that female students tend to exhibit higher levels of examination anxiety due to heightened emotional sensitivity and greater academic worry, whereas male students often display lower reported anxiety but may adopt avoidance coping strategies. Similarly, Okeke and Nwankwo (2021) observed that female undergraduates were more likely to experience physiological symptoms of anxiety such as tension and nervousness, while males demonstrated relatively higher emotional suppression. However, recent studies emphasize that these differences are not absolute but depend on coping skills, personality traits, and emotional regulation abilities. Emotional intelligence also interacts with sex in shaping students' responses to examination stress. Female students with high emotional intelligence tend to channel emotional awareness into effective preparation and help-seeking behaviours, thereby reducing anxiety levels. Male students with strong emotional regulation skills are more likely to maintain confidence and composure under

examination pressure. Research by Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2020) confirmed that emotional intelligence moderates gender differences in anxiety, indicating that emotionally intelligent students regardless of sex demonstrate improved resilience and psychological adjustment during examinations.

The interrelationship among emotional intelligence, sex, and examination anxiety therefore becomes evident within the university context. While examination anxiety arises from academic demands, financial pressures, and environmental stressors, students' emotional intelligence determines how effectively they interpret and manage these stressors. Sex differences further influence emotional reactions and coping styles, thereby shaping individual anxiety experiences. Students with high emotional intelligence, whether male or female, are more capable of regulating fear, maintaining concentration, and adapting to examination challenges, whereas those with low emotional intelligence are more vulnerable to heightened anxiety and its negative academic and health consequences. Consequently, understanding the combined influence of emotional intelligence and sex on examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State is essential. Such understanding will provide insights into psychological interventions, counselling strategies, and emotional skills training programmes aimed at promoting students' mental well-being and improving academic outcomes. The present study therefore examined how emotional intelligence and sex jointly influence examination anxiety among undergraduates, with the goal of contributing to improved psychological support systems within Nigerian public universities.

Statement of the Problem

Examination anxiety is a common psychological challenge that negatively affects undergraduates' academic performance and overall well-being. It is characterized by excessive worry, fear of failure, and emotional tension, especially during examinations. In public universities in Delta State, students face academic pressure, financial challenges, continuous assessments, and demanding examination schedules, which contribute to high levels of examination anxiety. Despite its prevalence, examination anxiety is often regarded as a normal part of academic life, leading to neglect of its underlying psychological and long-term effects. Examination anxiety disrupts students' cognitive and emotional functioning by affecting concentration, memory recall, time management, and confidence, causing some capable students to perform below expectation. Observations also indicate that some undergraduates experience serious physical and emotional symptoms such as illness, sleeplessness, fatigue, and even collapse during examination periods, showing that examination anxiety is both an academic and health concern. Furthermore, variations in emotional intelligence and sex appear to influence how students experience and cope with examination anxiety. Students with low emotional intelligence often struggle to regulate emotions and manage stress, while differences between male and female students may affect coping strategies and anxiety levels. However, the combined influence of emotional intelligence and sex on examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State remains unclear. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate these variables in order to provide insights that can help develop effective strategies for reducing examination anxiety and improving students' psychological well-being and academic success.

Research Questions

The following research questions have thus been raised to guide the study;

1. What is the level of emotional intelligence among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State
2. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in Public universities in Delta State?
3. What is the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in Public universities in Delta State?

- 2 There is no significant moderating impact of sex on the relationship between self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State?

RESEARCH METHODS

The design employed for this study is a correlational research design. The population of this study comprises 30,052 undergraduate students in three public Universities in Delta State, The sample for this study comprised 500 undergraduate students, drawn from a total population using the systematic sampling techniques, The instrument for data collection is a questionnaire titled: Emotional Intelligence, Sex and Examination Anxiety among Undergraduates. The validity of the instrument was established by experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University, Abraka. A reliability test was carried out using Cronbach Alpha to established the internal consistency. This yielded reliability indices of .892, and .869 for Emotional Intelligence and Examination Anxiety respectively. The questionnaire were administered to undergraduates directly by the researcher with the help of two research assistants, All the research questions were answered using the Pearson's's Product Moment Correlation and Coefficient of determination while the hypotheses were tested using linear and multiple regression. The PPMC was used to determine the relationship that exists between the dependent and the independent variables. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the Level of emotional intelligence of undergraduate in Delta State Universities?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of emotional intelligence of undergraduate in Delta State universities

S/N.	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	I recognize how my feelings affect my performance	3.42	.90	High
2.	I realize when I am being difficult	3.20	.85	High
3.	Awareness of my own emotion is very important to me at all times	3.13	.97	High
4.	I can quickly control my anger	2.74	1.08	High
5.	I am attentive to the emotional needs and concerns of my students.	2.80	1.10	High
6.	I am aware of my strengths	2.87	1.09	High
7.	I am able to show a sense of humour and perspective about myself	2.68	1.09	High
8.	I am confident of myself	2.59	1.10	High
9.	I can know when I feel anxious	2.52	1.09	High
10.	I know things that makes me happy	2.61	1.12	High
11.	I manage my impulsive feelings distressing emotions well	3.48	.87	High
12.	I stay focused under pressure	3.18	.85	High
13.	I maintain standards of honesty and integrity	3.15	.96	High
14.	I admit my own mistakes	2.75	1.08	High
15.	I hold myself accountable for personal performance	2.79	1.11	High
16.	Others find it difficult to know my mood	2.92	1.07	High
17.	I rarely lose my temper when dealing with difficult things	2.72	1.09	High
18.	I am good at what other needs in other to boost their abilities	2.62	1.07	High
19.	I relate well to my course mate	2.55	1.12	High
20.	I offer assignments that challenges a person's skill	2.67	1.12	High
	Average mean	2.87	1.04	High

Mean and standard 2.50

Table 1 shows the mean ratings on the level of emotional intelligence among undergraduates in Delta State universities. The findings reveal that all items recorded mean scores above the benchmark mean of 2.50, indicating a high level of emotional intelligence among the respondents. The highest mean scores were recorded for "I manage my impulsive feelings and distressing emotions well" (Mean = 3.48), "I

recognize how my feelings affect my performance” (Mean = 3.42), and “I stay focused under pressure” (Mean = 3.18). These results suggest that students are emotionally aware, capable of emotional regulation, and able to cope effectively with academic pressure. Other items such as “I maintain standards of honesty and integrity” (Mean = 3.15) and “I realize when I am being difficult” (Mean = 3.20) further indicate strong personal responsibility and self-awareness among the students. The grand mean of 2.87, which is higher than the benchmark mean, implies that undergraduates in Delta State universities generally demonstrate high emotional intelligence, which is essential for effective interpersonal relationships, stress management, and academic success.

Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the mean ratings of emotional intelligence among undergraduates in Delta State universities.

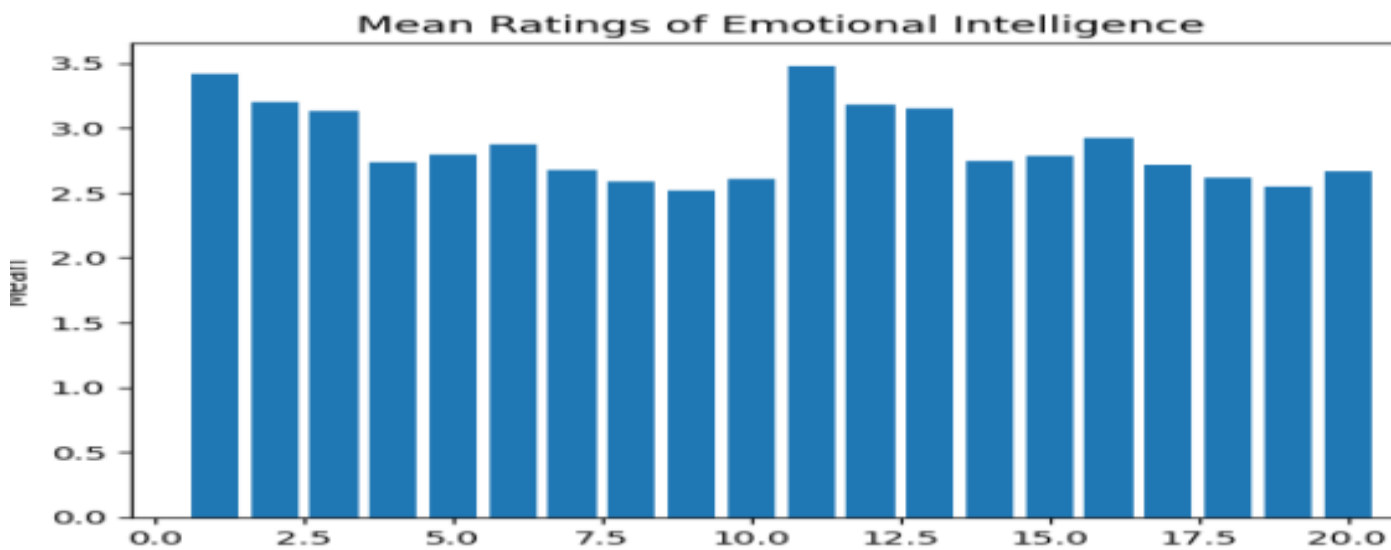


Figure 1 presents a bar chart of the mean ratings of emotional intelligence among undergraduates in Delta State universities. The graph shows that all the items have mean scores above the benchmark mean of 2.50, indicating a consistently high level of emotional intelligence across the respondents. Items related to emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and focus under pressure recorded notably high mean values. The relatively uniform height of the bars suggests consistency in students’ responses, implying that most undergraduates are emotionally aware, self-controlled, and capable of managing interpersonal relationships effectively. This pattern confirms a high emotional intelligence level among the students.

Research Questions 2: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in Public universities in Delta State?

Table 2: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation (r) and coefficient of determination Analysis of emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State

Variables	N	r	r ²	r ² %	Remark
Emotional intelligence	500	.777	.603	60.3	Positive relationship
Examination anxiety					

Independent Variable: emotional intelligence, Dependent Variable: Examination anxiety

Table 2 showed the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation (r) and coefficient of determination value of .777 as the degree of the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. The positive relationship indicates that as the influence of emotional intelligence increases, examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State also increases. The coefficient of determination (r²) value of .603 indicated that emotional

intelligence contributed 60.3% to the variation of examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. Thus, it was concluded that emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State has a positive relationship.

Research Question 3: What is the moderating impact of sex on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State?

Table 3: Multiple Correlation (*r*) and coefficient of determination Analysis of Self-efficacy, Emotional intelligence and Study habit and Examination anxiety Among Undergraduates in public universities in Delta State?

Variables	N	R	R ²	R ² %	Remark
Gender					
Emotional intelligence	500	.920	.846	84.6	Positive relationship
Examination anxiety					

Independent Variables: gender, emotional intelligence.

Dependent Variable: Examination anxiety

Table 3 showed that the Multiple Correlation of the moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety was $R = .920$. This value indicates that moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety is positive. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of .846 indicated that gender, emotional intelligence jointly contributed 84.6% to the variation in examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. Thus, it was concluded that the relationship moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety is positive.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in Public universities in Delta State

Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis of Emotional intelligence and Examination anxiety Among Undergraduates in public universities in Delta State

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19799.021	1	19799.021	544.330	.000 ^b
	Residual	13021.601	498	36.373		
	Total	32820.622	499			

a. Dependent Variable: examination anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), emotional intelligence

Table 4 showed a linear regression analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State, with a computed F-value of 544.330 and a p-value of 0.000. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant moderating impact of sex on the relationship between self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Moderating Impact of Gender on Emotional intelligence and Examination anxiety Among Undergraduates in public universities in Delta State

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.841	1.563		1.818	.070
	Gender	-.740	.417	-.038	-1.777	.076
	emotional intelligence	.529	.041	.362	5.989	.000

$\alpha = 0.05$

a. Dependent Variable: examination anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), gender, *Emotional intelligence*

Table 5 shows multiple regression analysis of the moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for impact of sex on examination anxiety of undergraduate in public universities from emotional intelligence were -661, and .913 respectively; the standardized coefficient (β) were .072, and .608 with $t=-1.777$, 5.989 and 4.598, therefore gender, emotional intelligence, study habit was significant at alpha level of 0.05. Its therefore concluded that there is a significant relationship between, emotional intelligence and examination anxiety of undergraduate in public universities in Delta South Senatorial District. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that there was significant moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State.

Discussion of Findings

The Level of Emotional Intelligence of Undergraduates in Delta State Universities

The first finding showed that undergraduates in Delta State universities possess a high level of emotional intelligence, as evidenced by the grand mean score exceeding the benchmark mean. This indicates that students are emotionally aware, capable of regulating their emotions, and able to manage interpersonal relationships effectively. The high emotional intelligence displayed by the undergraduates suggests that they can cope with academic stress, maintain focus under pressure, and demonstrate empathy toward others, which are essential skills for both academic and social adjustment. This finding suggests that emotional intelligence may contribute positively to students' academic engagement and overall well-being. Students who can manage their emotions effectively are more likely to remain motivated and resilient during challenging academic situations. This finding is supported by Goleman (1498), who emphasized that emotional intelligence is a critical factor in determining success in both academic and life pursuits. The finding also agrees with the study of Salami (2010), who found that emotional intelligence significantly influenced students' academic adjustment and achievement in Nigerian universities. In addition, the result aligns with Aremu and Tejumola (2008), who reported that students with high emotional intelligence demonstrated better stress management and interpersonal relationships within the university environment.

Emotional intelligence and Examination anxiety Among Undergraduates in public universities in Delta State

The second finding in this study revealed that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. The second finding of this study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. that there was a statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety behaviour among students in public SS2 in Delta State. The study believes that emotional intelligence can reduce examination anxiety behaviour when a student's emotional intelligence is high. As a result of this, students' emotional intelligence needs to be optimal maximum to enable them to overcome the negative feelings of examination. This implies that students who possess higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to manage the stress and pressure of examinations more effectively than their counterparts with lower levels of emotional intelligence. A possible explanation for this outcome is that individuals with strong emotional intelligence are better equipped to recognize, understand, and regulate

their emotions in stressful academic contexts. They are able to manage fear, pressure, and negative thoughts associated with examinations, thereby reducing the intensity of examination anxiety. Such students often adopt healthier coping strategies, such as self-motivation, positive self-talk, and problem-focused approaches, which enable them to face examinations with greater confidence. Conversely, students with poor emotional regulation may find it difficult to control their stress responses, which in turn heightens examination anxiety. This finding aligns with Mousavi (2012), who revealed that emotional intelligence is a significant correlate of examination anxiety. Mousavi's study supports the argument that students who can identify and regulate their emotions experience less psychological distress during examinations, thereby improving their overall academic performance. Similarly, other studies have suggested that emotional intelligence fosters resilience and adaptability, which are essential skills for coping with examination stress in higher education environments. The results of current study have been supported by Malik et al. (2013) who studied the same variables among the students of Punjab. They found inverse relation of emotional intelligence and test anxiety of secondary school students. Zheng et al. (2023) found significant positive correlation with emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among freshmen. Thus, low emotional intelligence scores are correlated with increasing examination anxiety of students. This idea was also supported by Sajjad et al. (2017) that emotional intelligence can be supportive in managing library anxiety among students leading to better academic performance. Though, this finding disagreed with the study of Ahmad and Aziz (2019) which revealed that exam anxiety has a weak negative significant correlation with emotional intelligence. Kalapriya and Anuradha's (2015) study indicated a significant difference between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement among Adolescents. The reason for the differences with previous findings could be a result of environmental factors and the learning condition of the students. Though, some previous studies supported this present finding.

Moderating Impact of Gender on the Relationship between Emotional intelligence and Examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State.

The third finding in this study revealed that there is a moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. The possible explanation for this finding could be that gender plays a significant role in shaping an individual's perception of their. The study is also in line with the study of Onekutu (2016) has shown that boys and girls perform equally in all subjects including English language, and as they grow to higher classes, the girls begin to get more interested in language Arts, while the boys take more to sciences and Social Sciences. This has resulted to a situation where there are more boys than girls offering Social Sciences. This finding contradict the study of Hembree (2018) that shows that there was no significant difference between the general examination anxiety of male students and that of female students. However, the issue of gender and students' examination anxiety has remained a controversial one. This finding is in line with the study of Oyiboand Oghounu (2023), who revealed that gender has a significant impact on the relationship between self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, study habit, and examination anxiety among undergraduate in public universities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in determining the level of examination anxiety among undergraduates in public universities in Delta State. Students with higher levels of emotional intelligence particularly in areas such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and stress management tend to experience lower levels of examination anxiety. In contrast, students with lower emotional intelligence are more vulnerable to heightened worry, tension, and fear during examinations. Furthermore, sex was found to influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and examination anxiety. Differences between male and female students in emotional expression, coping strategies, and stress response patterns contributed to variations in anxiety levels. This suggests that emotional intelligence does not operate in isolation but interacts with sex-related factors in shaping students' examination experiences. Therefore, reducing examination anxiety among undergraduates requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens emotional intelligence while also considering sex-based differences in emotional processing and coping mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Emotional intelligence development programmes should be integrated into counselling services and student support initiatives to enable undergraduates effectively manage stress and regulate their emotions.
2. Faculties and departments should organize regular seminars on effective examination preparation techniques to reduce examination anxiety among study.
3. Counsellors should develop intervention strategies that address the distinct ways male and female students experience and cope with examination anxiety.
4. Universities should incorporate courses on emotional regulation into the general studies curriculum to equip students with lifelong competencies for managing examination-related stress.

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