

## **The Impact of a Fun Therapy and Modifying the Negative Thoughts and Attitudes in Reducing the Anxiety of the Exam Among University Students**

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**Abstract:** The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of using a therapeutic program that includes fun therapy and modify the negative thoughts and their trends towards the exam during the lecture and before the exam to alleviate the feelings of fear and anxiety among the students. The sample includes 256 students from Al Ain University of Science and Technology who are between 18-22 years of age. The researcher used a pre- and a post-test for the same group. The results of the study showed that, there is a statistical significant difference due to the use of the therapeutic program within 3 months for the same sample of the study. The researcher recommended that the use of entertainment has an impact in modifying the direction of students towards testing and reducing the anxiety of the test.

**Key words:** Exam anxiety, fun therapy, negative thoughts, negative attitudes, statistical, significant

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The concern is one of the most important sources that hinder the academic success of students at all stages of the study. The concern is described as a psychological state that leads to tension that makes the student concerned about his academic life and achievement (Brewin and Beaton, 2002). Many researchers have pointed out that anxiety in the educational and academic context leads to dispersion, difficulty concentrating and fatigue as well as a range of physical and health symptoms such as sweating, lethargy and digestive problems not to mention other social causes such as criticism by others and others.

Most of the students feel that the exam is especially, important because they are not sure of the academic abilities in addition to other factors such as age, fear, self confidence and self-esteem. Regardless of whether the concern is positive or negative, the hard-working individuals think that they are going to be important in addition to thinking about the job demands themselves. They think about how they can do this job more than they think of meeting their demands. This is why they are worried and if they do that, they will be very good and they will think of the first place in the negative. It is not necessary that this concern is due to the presence of weak academic or inability to study or the difficulty of the scientific subject but it occurs as a result of the student's feeling that they are being evaluated (Holroyd and Appel, 1980).

For this purpose, this study was conducted to reveal the great role played by anxiety in defeating the main objective of the educational process and its outcomes. Where the researcher finds that no matter what the

student studied and diligent but with the concern that learning will be useless and useful and scientific because the concern of the exam is one of the main obstacles to the success of students in all academic programs which may reduce the chance of success satisfactorily or even obtain academic certification (Hight, 1997). Because the negative thoughts have a large role on the psyche and mentality of the student to make him a sad man depressed, a little enthusiasm towards learning and unable to cope with the educational environment. And the negative thoughts towards the study always and never think of failure and fear and anxiety about his educational career instead of positive expectations, despite his diligence. Because negative thoughts work on the emergence of problems for the individual such as shyness, anxiety, fear and frustration.

In addition, the negative attitudes and ideas towards the examination are among the most important factors affecting the level of mental and academic students. These trends and ideas are a systematic way of thinking and feeling the attitude of what has been gained from the environment surrounding the individual and the result of the experience of the situation. Based on this experience, frequent attitude. These trends are inherited and family and friends have a great role to play (Huang and Sisco, 1994). Since, the idea and direction of the individual towards the experience of the exam is acquired, then it can be modified and changed to a specific condition, knowing that the student will resist this change, especially, if it can learn in the early childhood. However, it can be overcome if an integrated program is available that helps in the progression from negative to positive and conducive to the development of sound and effective relationships (Khatib, 1997).

This study aims at identifying and how to address these ideas in order to reduce the exam anxiety of the sample of the study by applying a therapeutic program based on the treatment of fun and to modify the negative ideas and attitudes towards the exam and then propose therapeutic solutions that reduce the concern which is time-consuming and effort of the student.

**The importance of the study:** The importance of this study is to determine the effective role of changing students negative attitudes and ideas in reducing the anxiety of the exam. The researcher adopted the exam anxiety scale (Hamid, 2000) to measure the students anxiety in the exam. A systematic treatment program was designed from negative to positive based on fun therapy, discussion and open discussion about irrational students ideas and causes.

To determine the size of the problem of exam anxiety among the students at the university, a preliminary study was conducted to ascertain the existence of the exam anxiety among the students and its levels if any by applying the study tool as a preliminary test to university students through the university website as well as conducting pre- and post-examination interviews.

The results of the initial study revealed that there is concern among students at different levels and that anxiety and negative ideas frustrate the student's hopes and undermine their confidence in their cognitive level and reduce their motivation towards learning which negatively affects their academic career.

The preliminary study also helped to outline the current study and set its objectives. These results confirmed that any negative idea should be studied in a way that helps educators to build curricula and policies that limit the phenomenon of anxiety and negative thoughts. The study also helps those who are involved in the educational process to turn from negative to positive for students towards learning to achieve the desired educational goals.

**Questions of the study:** The aim of this study was to answer a major question: Do students at Al Ain University for Science and Technology suffer from examination concerns and levels? The following sub questions from him:

- Do students at Al Ain University for Science and Technology have concerns about exams?
- What is the level of anxiety experienced by the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology from exams?
- Are there any statistically significant differences among the sample on the exam anxiety scale?

- Is there a statistically significant difference between the samples in the level of concern of the observations due to gender variable?
- Are there any statistically significant differences among the sample on the exam anxiety scale due to the variable of the training program?

**Study hypothesis:**

- The students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology are not concerned about exams
- There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about exams
- There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of test anxiety among the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about the exams due to the impact of the therapeutic program
- There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students at Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about exams due to gender

**Procedural definitions of search variables:**

- Attitudes are a set of preparations and preparations that the student shows towards a subject
- Negative thoughts a set of suggestions that hinder students from progressing in their academic career
- An exam anxiety is an acquired emotion compounded by several dimensions which are awe-inspiring exam, exam confusion, exam discomfort, lack of exam skills and trouble taking the exam (Hamid, 2000)

**Fun therapy:** It is a therapeutic program that is usually developed by laughter therapy or therapeutic laughter, developed by psychiatrist Steve Wilson (Ohio), founder of the world laughter tour. The program is based on the use of humor and laughter to help students cope with or deal with a variety of psychological and physical issues, a means of helping people reconnect with nature. This program also provides an opportunity for students facing the exam to be concerned and fear to rethink the test as a natural and unaffected situation by using a series of structured exercises in a supportive environment (MacDonald, 2004).

**Previous studies:** Most of the empirical studies conducted in recent decades on university student's examination anxiety have covered different topics. Studies five decades ago dealt with differences between behavioral, cognitive or cognitive behavioral methods. After that, the studies were actively concerned with treatment techniques such as immunization against

stress (Sharma *et al.*, 1996; Anton, 1976; Berrick, 1972; Kaplan *et al.*, 1979; Meichenbaum and Butler, 1980; Paulman and Kennelly, 1984) and others, discussed the effectiveness of traditional cognitive and behavioral interventions in addressing the anxiety of the exam (Paulman and Kennelly 1984; Galassi *et al.*, 1981).

The following are some of the recent Arab and foreign studies that dealt with the topic of concern in general and the concern of the exam in particular and its impact on individual performance and academic performance of students.

The study by Alkhayat and Mowhaf (2016), they randomly distributed students from Princess Rahma College in two experimental and control groups to measure the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral therapy program to reduce psychological stress and improve student's academic achievement. The results of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the two groups for the benefit of the experimental group which confirms the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral program in the alleviation of psychological stress resulting from the examinations of students, the study recommended the need to study the impact of factors affecting the achievement of the academic.

Cho *et al.* (2016) examined the effectiveness of the daily exercise to reduce the anxiety of the exam at university students. The sample consisted of 36 participants randomly selected and divided into three equal groups: the first group was subjected to breathing exercises, the second group was subjected to breathing exercises with cognitive re-evaluation and the third group was not trained. The results of the study showed that breathing exercise had a positive effect on reducing test anxiety (Group 1 and 2). In addition, the first group showed more positive ideas about the other two groups. The results also indicated that the training on breathing and the re-evaluation of the cognitive assessment are considered to be useful methods of testing. However, reflection on positive thinking has proved more effective than cognitive reevaluation.

The study by Ahmed *et al.* (2015) examined the effect of the effectiveness of rational therapy in reducing the level of anxiety among students in the secondary stage. The sample consisted of 15 male and female students from Sinai governorate. The results of the study indicate the high level of anxiety among the sample and the concern association with irrational ideas and beliefs that need to be changed and modified in addition to the low level of anxiety in the sample after the application of the study program and the lower the level of anxiety in favor of females than males.

The study of Meqdad and El Yami (2012) examined the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral therapy program for anxiety disorder in a sample of patients. The

sample consisted of 9 patients who received moderate to severe grades. On the sample during 16 weekly sessions, the results showed that the cognitive behavioral program was effective in reducing the symptoms of disorder in the study sample.

Study by Meqdad and El Yami (2012), they studied the aim of the effectiveness of a behavioral guidance program in reducing the anxiety of the exam for a sample of students consisting of 60 students in the secondary stage of the students. The results of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences among the experimental group in favor of direct group counseling.

Dababesh study, a study to investigate the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral program in reducing social anxiety among 11th graders and its impact on self-esteem through the design of an instructional program. The sample consisted of 24 students and then divided into two control and experimental groups. The social anxiety scale and the self-assessment scale were applied to the sample. The results showed that there is an effectiveness of the extension program in reducing social anxiety and differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the social anxiety scale in the tribal and remote measurement in favor of telemetry. Between the statistical mean scores of the experimental group on the scale of self-esteem in the pre and post indices for post measurement.

Piedmont (1995) study examined the basis of fear of success and fear of failure and the basis of examination anxiety and personal variables, the study was conducted on two groups of students with a high level of anxiety exam, the first group suffers from nervousness and the second group of high conscience, the results of the study indicate that there is a positive relationship between the areas of personality and mental conscience and examination anxiety where the personality is known to lean towards the negative including depression and anxiety and hostility and conscience known to perseverance, organization and motivation towards directed goal.

It is concluded from the previous studies that the effectiveness of the cognitive and behavioral therapy program in reducing anxiety disorder, the interrelationship between cognitive and behavioral strategies and training to reduce anxiety and behavioral cognitive therapy helps to define cognitive framework to help students to think and change negative thoughts and attitudes.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The aim of the present study was to test the effect of a therapeutic program based on the treatment of the fun and to modify the negative attitudes and ideas of the students towards the exam and its effect in reducing the

anxiety of their exam. The researcher adopted the experimental method to compare the grades of students according to the Zahran scale before and after the implementation of a behavioral guidance program.

A pre- and a post-test were performed on the study sample of 256 students at the University of Al Ain University for Science and Technology, between the ages of 18-22 years to examine the effect of the cognitive-behavioral therapy program on the student's response to the scale used and to compare the differences Which was obtained according to the implementation of the program for a period of three months during the second semester of the academic year 2016-2017 which is the duration of teaching the actual university course and was adopted by applying the study on the Zahran scale 1999 which is commonly used to measure student's exam anxiety.

**Study sample:** The study sample consisted of 256 male and female students at the University of Al Ain University for Science and Technology, ranging in age from 18-22 years and from different disciplines.

**Study instrument:** The instrument consists of 93 items for each of the three choices (rarely, often, often). Each choice has a one, two, three degrees, respectively and the items are arranged, so that, the grades are ascending to all the terms (Table 1).

The dimensions of the degree will be at 93 while the dimensions of the degree is at 279 where the students will be classified into three groups depending on the scale of anxiety after applying them as follows:

- Low level of anxiety (if the student score is between 93-155)
- Average level of anxiety is (if the student score is between 156-217)
- High level of anxiety (if the student's score is between 218-279)

This measure which was confirmed by the original researcher by Hamid (2000) was adopted with the aim of relying on the scale mainly. The validity of the instruments was verified by presenting it to a group of experienced and competent arbitrators in the fields related

**Table 1: The distribution of items based on Zahran's scale of dimensions**

| Dimension/domain            | Items |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Intimidation of exam        | 1-26  |
| Confusion about exam        | 27-45 |
| Tension from exam           | 46-60 |
| Annoyance from exam         | 61-72 |
| Lack of skills of exam      | 73-86 |
| Disorder of submitting exam | 87-93 |

to the subject of the study professors and experts in: Psychology, Measurement, Evaluation and Arabic, some minor adjustments to some paragraphs of the scale. As for the stability of the instruments, the value of the stability coefficient calculated on the Cronbach alpha scale was indicated to a high and sufficient value for the purposes of applying the scale. The stability factor value was about 0.9450.

The following statistical methods were used to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the study: calculation of the arithmetic mean, variance and test for comparison between groups.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After Zahran scale has been applied to the study sample in the tribal and remote testing method, the following results were obtained which will be discussed, interpreted and compared with previous studies in the same field.

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of using a therapeutic program that includes the use of fun and the modification of negative thoughts and attitudes towards the exam during the lecture and before the exam in order to alleviate the feelings of fear and anxiety in the sample of the study. The study applied to 256 students from Al Ain University for Science and Technology aged 18-22 years. The researcher used pre- and post tests for the same group. The results of the study proved that there were differences of statistical significance due to the use of the therapeutic program which was applied for 3 months on the same sample of the study. The researcher recommended the use of entertainment in addition to other topics that help to change the ideas and attitudes of students towards tests in order to alleviate anxiety and increase focus and then increase collection. In particular, the study came to answer the following questions.

**Questions of study:** The aim of this study was to answer a major question, do students at Al Ain University for Science and Technology suffer from examination concerns and levels? The following questions arose from him:

- Do students at Al Ain University for Science and Technology have concerns about exams?
- What is the level of anxiety experienced by the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology from exams?
- Are there statistically significant differences among the sample on the test anxiety scale before and after the application of the treatment program?

- Is there a statistically significant difference between the sample in the level of concern of the observations due to gender variable?

To test the following hypothesis.

**Study hypothesis:** The students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology are not concerned about exams: There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about exams. There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about the exams due to the impact of the therapeutic program. There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about exams due to gender

The data were processed by the Statistical analysis Program (SPSS) after the questionnaire was distributed to the 256 sample students. The student's responses were examined on the scale before and after the program was applied to measure its effectiveness and to show whether there were significant differences between their scores after application of CBT before application. After two tests: pre- and post-test after applying the scale to the study sample, the study reached the following results (Table 2).

**Second: answer the study questions:** Results related to the questions; first and second: do students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology have concerns about exams? And what level of anxiety? The results of this question indicate the presence of fear, confusion and tension of the exam at the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology where the results before the application of the program on the six areas of the scale are as follows (Table 3). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and take the alternative hypothesis that

**Table 2: Results on test anxiety levels before applying the program**

| Domain                       | No. of examinees | Mean   | SD      |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------|---------|
| Intimidation of exam         | 256              | 2.1642 | 0.35325 |
| Confusion about exam         | 256              | 2.0227 | 0.47665 |
| Tension from submitting exam | 256              | 1.9961 | 0.59320 |
| Annoyance from exam          | 256              | 1.9671 | 0.41924 |
| Lack of skills of exam       | 256              | 1.9124 | 0.51132 |
| Disorder of submitting exam  | 256              | 1.8781 | 0.45495 |

**Table 3: Results regarding test anxiety levels after applying the progra**

| Domain                       | No. of examinees | Mean   | SD      |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------|---------|
| Intimidation of exam         | 256              | 2.0524 | 0.41462 |
| Confusion about exam         | 256              | 1.9805 | 0.61019 |
| Tension from submitting exam | 256              | 1.9451 | 0.53894 |
| Annoyance from exam          | 256              | 1.8231 | 0.49990 |
| Lack of skills of exam       | 256              | 1.8109 | 0.59033 |
| Disorder of submitting exam  | 256              | 1.7995 | 0.50806 |

indicates the existence of different levels and forms of examination anxiety among the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology.

Results related to the third question: Are there any statistically significant differences among the sample on the exam anxiety scale before and after the application of the treatment program? The second hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among the students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about the exams due to the impact of the therapeutic program.

The results presented in Table 4 show that there are statistically significant differences in test anxiety levels pre and post the application of the treatment program. This clearly indicates the effectiveness of the program in reducing the anxiety levels of the students following its application. These results indicated that the level of significance of the differences. The total scale is 0.000; this is <0.05 which is the level we set for testing zero hypothesis. In this case, we reject the zero hypothesis that there are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology Of the exams are attributed to the impact of the berna therapeutic c and invites us to take the alternative hypothesis that indicate there are statistically significant differences between pre and post levels of test anxiety among the students of Al Ain University of Science and Technology due to the impact of the therapeutic program differences.

The results indicated that there are statistically significant differences in the levels of test anxiety pre and post the application of the treatment program in all fields: exam fright (0.000), confusion of exam (0.000) and disturbance of the exam (0.000), stress test performance (0.000), loss of exam skills (0.000) and test disturbance (0.000).

Results related to the fourth question: Is there a statistically significant difference between the sample in the level of concern of the observations due to gender variable? The fourth hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences in the levels of exam anxiety among students of Al Ain University for Science and Technology concerned about the examinations due to gender.

The results presented in Table 5 show that there are no statistically significant differences in the exam anxiety before the application of the program can be attributed to the gender variable in general. The significance is 0.411 but there are differences in some areas as well as loss of exam skills (0.046).

**Table 4: Results of (paired sample t0.test) to comparison between pre and post levels of exam anxiety**

| Domain                       | No. of cases | Pre-test |         | Post-test |         | Mean differences | Mean     | Sig.  |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------|------------------|----------|-------|
|                              |              | Mean     | SD      | Mean      | SD      |                  |          |       |
| Intimidation of exam         | 256          | 20.1642  | 0.35325 | 2.0524    | 0.41462 | 00.1118          | -190.569 | 0.000 |
| Confusion about exam         | 256          | 20.0227  | 0.47665 | 1.9805    | 0.61019 | 00.0422          | -200.766 | 0.000 |
| Tension from submitting exam | 256          | 10.9961  | 0.59320 | 1.9451    | 0.53894 | 00.0510          | -110.858 | 0.000 |
| Annoyance from exam          | 256          | 10.9671  | 0.41924 | 1.8231    | 0.49990 | 00.1440          | -100.475 | 0.000 |
| Lack of skills of exam       | 256          | 10.9124  | 0.51132 | 1.8109    | 0.59033 | 00.1050          | -80.373  | 0.000 |
| Disorder of submitting exam  | 256          | 10.8781  | 0.45495 | 1.7995    | 0.50806 | 00.0786          | -30.995  | 0.000 |
| Total                        | 256          | 20.0877  | 0.45260 | 1.9871    | 0.38920 | 00.1006          | 110.877  | 0.000 |

**Table 5: The results of independent samples t-test due to gender variable**

| Domain                                      | F-values | Sig.  | t-values | df     | Sig.    |       |
|---|----------|-------|----------|--------|---------|-------|
| <b>Levene test for homogeneity variance</b> |          |       |          |        |         |       |
| Intimidation of exam                        | 6.538    | 0.011 | HV       | -0.880 | 510     | 0.379 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | -0.824 | 260.215 | 0.411 |
| Confusion about exam                        | 4.988    | 0.026 | HV       | 1.260  | 510     | 0.208 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 1.188  | 264.026 | 0.236 |
| Tension from submitting exam                | 6.332    | 0.012 | HV       | 0.341  | 510     | 0.733 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 0.325  | 270.194 | 0.746 |
| Annoyance from exam                         | 40.299   | 0.039 | HV       | 2.551  | 510     | 0.011 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 2.435  | 271.352 | 0.016 |
| Lack of skills related to exam              | 1.202    | 0.274 | HV       | 1.999  | 510     | 0.046 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 1.957  | 286.918 | 0.051 |
| Disorder of submitting exam                 | 0.734    | 0.392 | HV       | 3.001  | 510     | 0.003 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 2.928  | 285.117 | 0.004 |
| Total                                       | 7.308    | 0.007 | HV       | 1.722  | 510     | 0.086 |
|   |          |       | NON-HV   | 1.625  | 264.670 | 0.105 |

The results of the study are consistent with Hamid (2000) study of the role of the therapeutic program of many students before the exam. It should be noted here that there is a scarcity and lack in studies that dealt with the role of entertainment and laughter on the concern of the test. And the second hypothesis was not achieved also which states that there are no statistically significant differences among the sample at the level of examination anxiety where the results showed the existence of three levels of concern and different rates before and after treatment.

Researchers such as Al Sayed argue that play helps the student arrange his or her life events in a way that does not bother him or worry. As Piaget explains, according to his educational philosophy, he provides the learner with educational experiences that enable him to develop his scientific knowledge and practice cognitive processes.

Playing and entertainment is also an important factor in the psychological preparation of the learner which helps in the academic development of the learner. Play and entertainment help organize educational experiences and educational activities help the learner to develop knowledge building and self-discovery (Al-Helal, 2005). And that play also helps to free the emotions of the learner.

**CONCLUSION**

Upon being based on the study findings, it is obvious that both laughter and fun, easing the feelings of fear before the exam and changing the subject and talk

about entertaining subjects before the exam which was conducted during the pre-exam guidance sessions have a positive impact on reducing the level of anxiety among students. It changes the student’s sense of anxiety and fear to relaxation and satisfaction which contributes to a more understanding of the test questions and comfort while answering the test subjects.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommends the following:

- Urge decision-makers to build guidance programs to reduce student’s anxiety level before testing
- Encourage teachers to introduce topics and activities that help students overcome anxiety
- Use mentoring programs that include creative activities and skills that reduce test anxiety
- Integrating activities and fun activities for students during classes
- Holding student workshops that contribute to alleviating concerns
- Teacher training on how to mitigate student anxiety

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