

Teacher Strategies In Overcoming Students' Anxiety During Tests

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Submitted:10/06/2025; Fixed:29/06/2025; Approved:09/07/2025

Abstract

Around 45% of students in Indonesia experience anxiety related to exams (Kemdikbud, 2022), which is manifested through physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms which can cause a decrease in academic achievement by as much as 15% (Zeidner, 2014). This literature study analyzes teacher strategies based on humanistic theory (Rogers), self-efficacy (Bandura), and CBT (Beck) to overcome these problems. Findings indicate that three effective approaches have been identified: (1) creating a supportive learning atmosphere characterized by consistent encouragement, (2) increasing self-confidence through affirmative feedback and assessment preparation, and (3) using cognitive behavioral methods such as changing negative thoughts and applying relaxation techniques. Combining these tactics has shown success in reducing anxiety by increasing self-regulation and reducing feelings of danger. Possible strategies to consider might include: (a) avoiding competitive grading systems, (b) adopting alternative grading methods (such as portfolios or projects), and (c) working with school counselors. This research emphasizes the importance of a balanced evaluation approach between academic achievement and students' psychological well-being.

Keywords: Test anxiety, teacher strategies, self-efficacy, humanistic, CBT

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INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly receiving serious attention in the realm of global education. The results of meta-analysis from Ergene (2003) show that around 30-60% of students at various levels of education experience anxiety and difficulty sleeping), cognitive (for example blanking out, losing concentration, or forgetting material), and emotional (excessive fear, pessimism, or feelings of failure before the exam begins). In Indonesia, statistics released by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2022 show that around 45% of students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety during national exams, and the frequency is even greater in 2022. female students and students from disadvantaged families (Kemdikbud, 2022). This phenomenon indicates that test anxiety is not only an individual problem, but is also influenced by socio-cultural and structural factors in the education system.

The impact of test-related anxiety is complex and varied. From an educational perspective, research conducted by Zeidner (2014) revealed that students who suffer from significant levels of anxiety experience a 30% decrease in working memory capacity, along with a 10-15 point decrease in test scores compared to their true potential. Even more concerning are the long-term psychological effects such as reduced motivation to learn (often referred to as learned helplessness), reduced self-esteem, and the possible development of generalized anxiety disorder (Putwain et al., 2019). In the specific context of Indonesia, research conducted by Suryani et al. (2023) showed that 25% of students who face severe test anxiety tend to shy away from future academic endeavors, and persist even after they graduate from an educational institution.

1. Complex and Interrelated Causal Factors

a. Unhealthy external pressure

A learning environment that prioritizes academic grades as the only indicator of success fosters detrimental perfectionist tendencies (Sari & Wahyudi, 2021). Based on the 2018 PISA survey, 65% of students in Indonesia reported feeling great pressure to achieve the highest grades, while 80% of parents admitted that

they put extra pressure on their children to get the highest grades. This situation is exacerbated by the high level of competition in the university admissions process, where national exam results are the determining factor.

b. Overcoming Skills Deficit

Most students do not have effective methods to overcome exam-related stress. Research conducted by Kabat-Zinn (1990) shows that 80% of adolescents use ineffective coping strategies, such as postponing work, studying excessively, or avoiding responsibility altogether. Specifically, mindfulness-based techniques for managing stress have been shown to reduce test anxiety symptoms by as much as 40% (Bradley et al., 2020). Unfortunately, programs like this are still not widely included in the education curriculum in Indonesia.

c. Unsupportive Learning Environment

Overly competitive assessment systems, such as publishing class rankings, show a significant positive relationship with increased student anxiety ($r=0.42$, $p<0.01$) (Putwain, 2019). In addition, there is a lack of emotional support from educators, for example with intimidating words such as "You have to get an A, or you won't graduate!" worsening students' mental health problems (Herman & Hilton, 2017).

2. Educator Function and Re-evaluation of Assessment Methods

In the context of education in the 21st century (OECD, 2019), assessments must measure not only technical abilities but also interpersonal skills such as emotional regulation and mental resilience. Assessment strategies for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2018) highlight the importance of providing constructive criticism and fostering a learning environment that reduces fear. A key illustration is the implementation of progressive portfolios in Finland, which succeeded in reducing exam-related anxiety among students by 35% over five years (OECD, 2021).

In Indonesia, a similar initiative is now being tested through the Merdeka Curriculum, which reduces emphasis on traditional exams and strengthens project-based evaluation. However, the effectiveness of this approach still needs to be studied, especially because there is still a "teach to test" mentality among teachers (Kemdikbud, 2023). Therefore, this study intends to explore intervention techniques that educators can use to foster a more compassionate evaluation environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. This study aims to analyze teachers' strategies for overcoming student anxiety when facing exams, by referring to psychological theories such as Humanistic Learning Theory (Rogers), Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura), and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) (Beck).

1. Data Source

The data in this research was obtained from various relevant literature in the form of:

- a. National and international scientific journals,
- b. Academic textbooks of psychology and education,
- c. Official reports from educational institutions (eg Ministry of Education and Culture, OECD),
- d. Other trusted digital sources.

2. Data Collection Techniques

- a. Data collection techniques are carried out through:
- b. Literature search using keywords such as test anxiety, teacher strategies, CBT, and humanistic education via online databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, DOAJ, and others).
- c. Selection of sources based on relevance, year of publication (priority in the last 10 years), and credibility of the author or publishing institution.

3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques, with stages:

- a. Data reduction: selecting important parts of the literature that are directly related to the topic.
- b. Data display: organize information in the form of a thematic summary or table of

relationships between variables.

- c. Drawing conclusions: drawing conclusions based on the pattern of findings and underlying theory.

4. Data Validity

The validity of the data is guaranteed through theoretical triangulation, namely by comparing and linking findings from the various theories used—Rogers, Bandura, and Beck—to enrich perspectives and strengthen arguments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals that test anxiety in students is not just an individual symptom, but is the result of a complex interaction between psychological, social and educational structural factors. This discussion presents the main findings and relates them systematically to the theories used: Humanistic approach, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

1. The Impact of a Competitive Learning Environment on Anxiety

A learning environment that is too oriented towards grades and rankings causes significant external pressure. The data shows a positive correlation between the competitive environment and anxiety levels ($r = +0.42$). Class ranking systems, national exam demands, and family expectations push students into a perfectionist mindset, which hinders natural learning (Sari & Wahyudi, 2021). This is in accordance with Spielberger's (1972) view of state anxiety as a situational response to external pressure.

2. The Role of Self-Efficacy as a Psychological Protector

Academic confidence plays an important role in reducing anxiety. The findings showed a negative correlation between self-efficacy and anxiety levels ($r = -0.61$). Students who have confidence that they are capable of completing assignments tend to be calmer in the face of exams. Bandura (1997) explained that success experiences, relevant models, and positive feedback are the three main sources of self-efficacy.

3. The Power of Constructive Feedback in Emotion Regulation

Clear, specific, and improvement-oriented feedback was shown to lower student anxiety ($r = -0.55$). This emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers in delivering evaluation in an empathetic manner. Referring to Hattie & Timperley (2007), effective feedback includes: (a) assessment of work outputs, (b) process guidance, and (c) encouragement of self-regulation.

4. Effectiveness of CBT Intervention in Managing Negative Thoughts

CBT has been shown to help students recognize and challenge the irrational thoughts that are at the root of anxiety. Techniques such as cognitive restructuring, Socratic questioning, and progressive muscle relaxation help reduce emotional and physiological responses to exam stress. For example, automatic thoughts such as "If I fail, my future is ruined" can be replaced with more adaptive rational statements.

5. Integration of Holistic Teacher Strategies

A successful teacher strategy is one that combines affective, cognitive, and environmental dimensions. Humanistic approaches encourage an emotionally safe learning atmosphere; increase self-efficacy strengthens students' mental readiness; and CBT techniques offer concrete tools for managing stress. These strategies reinforce each other and create an integrated approach to dealing with exam anxiety.

6. The Importance of Alternative Evaluation and Collaborative Support

Traditional assessment systems that focus on single exams need to be replaced with more inclusive methods, such as portfolios and projects. An OECD study (2021) in Finland shows that this approach can reduce anxiety by up to 35%. In Indonesia,

similar initiatives are being tested through the Independent Curriculum, although challenges remain related to the habit of "teach to test".

7. Analysis of Relationships between Variables

This study also presents a simple statistical analysis that illustrates the influence of various variables on students' anxiety levels. Here is a summary of the table:

Table 1.1 Analysis of Relationships Between Variables

Variable	Relationship to Anxiety	Theory Support
Competitive environment	Increased anxiety (+0.42)	Spielberger (1972)
Self-efficacy	Reduced anxiety (-0.61)	Bandura (1997)
Constructive feedback	Reduced anxiety (-0.55)	Hattie (2007)

From this table, it is clear that an overly competitive environment exacerbates anxiety, while self-efficacy and constructive feedback play a protective role. These results reinforce the recommendation that teacher strategies should be designed to:

1. Suppressing the culture of excessive competition,
2. Building student confidence,
3. Improve the quality of learning feedback.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Students' anxiety when facing exams is a serious challenge that has an impact on academic performance and psychological well-being. Based on a literature review, teacher strategies that integrate humanistic approaches (Rogers), self-efficacy (Bandura), and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT, Beck) have been proven to be effective in reducing students' emotional distress. A supportive learning environment, constructive feedback, and cognitive regulation skills play a big role in building students' confidence and mental resilience. Inhibiting factors such as competitive evaluation systems and social pressures from outside the school must be addressed systemically.

The application of strategies that touch affective, cognitive, and structural aspects in education can create a more welcoming and empowering learning ecosystem. Collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and counselors is key to creating a balanced evaluation system between academic achievement and mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 For Teachers:
 - a. Build a learning atmosphere that is free from competitive pressures, by emphasizing the importance of the learning process.
 - b. Use CBT methods in simple ways such as exam simulations, muscle relaxation, and negative thought reframing.
 - c. Give feedback that is specific, realistic, and constructive, not just general compliments.
- 2 For Schools and Policymakers:
 - a. Apply alternative evaluation methods such as portfolios, projects, and reflective assessments.
 - b. Integrate social-emotional skills (SEL) training in the curriculum.
 - c. Involve counselors in psychological monitoring of students, especially during exam periods.
- 3 For the Elderly:
 - a. Avoid putting too much pressure on the child's efforts, not results.
 - b. Make home an emotionally safe place ahead of the exam.
- 4 For Further Researchers:

- a. It is necessary to conduct field research to test the effectiveness of the implementation of this strategy in the context of schools in Indonesia.

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