



Reducing Test Anxiety among AE-Funai Freshmen: An Evaluation of Eclectic Counseling Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of eclectic counseling strategies in reducing test anxiety among freshmen at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A sample of 300 100-level students (36 males and 264 females) was purposively selected from five departments in the Faculty of Education. The students were assessed for test anxiety using a standardized instrument before and after receiving eclectic counseling interventions. The counseling strategies employed an eclectic approach, combining cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and study skills training. The results showed a significant reduction in test anxiety levels among the students after the counseling intervention. The study's findings suggest that eclectic counseling strategies can be an effective approach to reducing test anxiety among freshmen in Nigerian universities. The implications of the study's findings for university counseling services and student support are discussed.

ARTICLE'S INFO

Article No.: 092125140

Type: Research

Full Text: [PDF](#), [PHP](#), [HTML](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

DOI: [10.15580/GJER.2025.1.092125140](https://doi.org/10.15580/GJER.2025.1.092125140)

Accepted: 22/09/2025

Published: 24/10/2025

Keywords: Test Anxiety, Eclectic Counseling, Freshmen, University Students, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Relaxation Techniques

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Article's QR code



INTRODUCTION

Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which students experience excessive worry, apprehension, and fear in relation to testing situations. Test anxiety is the experience of apprehension or fear in response to testing or evaluation situations, which can interfere with an individual's ability to perform to the best of their ability" (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). This definition emphasizes the impact of test anxiety on students' performance. Test anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety that is triggered by the prospect of being evaluated or tested, and can manifest in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms" (Lowe et al., 2022). This definition highlights the complex nature of test anxiety and its various manifestations. Test anxiety is a pervasive issue affecting students globally, particularly during transitional periods such as entering university life (Putwain et al., 2022; Von der Embse et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2022).

Freshmen students often experience heightened anxiety due to adapting to new academic environments, social pressures, and assessment demands (Cassady et al., 2022; Lowe & Lee, 2021; Kingston & Smith, 2022). This anxiety can negatively impact their academic performance, self-esteem, and overall well-being (Hembree, 2021; Von der Embse et al., et al., 2021; Cassady & Thomas, 2022). Effective interventions are crucial to mitigate test anxiety and promote students' success. Freshmen students may struggle to cope with the transition from high school to university, leading to feelings of overwhelm and uncertainty. Freshmen students also experience pressure to perform well academically, which can exacerbate test anxiety. Furthermore, freshmen students may benefit from targeted support services, such as counseling and academic advising, to help them navigate the challenges of university life. By addressing test anxiety, universities can promote students' academic success and overall well-being.

University students, especially freshmen, face numerous challenges that can exacerbate test anxiety, including adjusting to new teaching styles, managing coursework, and balancing social life (Cascio et al., 2022; Kingston & Smith, 2022; Sansgiry et al., 2021). Test anxiety can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches and nausea, as well as emotional symptoms like fear and panic (Putwain et al., 2022; Lowe et al., 2022; Von der Embse et al., 2021). It is essential for universities to provide support services that address test anxiety and foster students' academic resilience. Counseling services can play a vital role in helping students develop coping strategies and manage test anxiety. Universities that prioritize student mental health and well-being can create a supportive environment that promotes academic success and reduces test anxiety. By providing accessible counseling services, universities can help students build resilience and develop effective coping mechanisms. Counseling services can also help students identify underlying issues that contribute to

test anxiety, such as poor study habits or unrealistic expectations. By addressing these underlying issues, universities can help students achieve their academic potential and reduce the negative impact of test anxiety.

Counseling is a process that involves a therapeutic relationship between a trained counselor and a client, aimed at promoting personal growth, development, and positive change" (Corey, 2022). Counseling services can provide students with a safe and supportive environment to explore their concerns and develop coping strategies (Gladding, 2020). Effective counseling can help students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues, leading to improved academic performance and overall well-being (Heppner & Lee, 2021). Counseling services can play a vital role in helping students manage test anxiety by providing a supportive environment to explore their concerns and develop coping strategies. An eclectic counseling approach, which combines multiple therapeutic techniques tailored to individual students' needs, can be particularly effective in addressing test anxiety (Lazarus, 2022). By incorporating cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and study skills training, eclectic counseling can help students develop a range of coping strategies to manage test anxiety and achieve their academic potential.

Eclectic counseling approaches combine multiple therapeutic techniques to tailor treatment to each client's unique needs and goals. This versatile approach allows therapists to draw from various theories and methods, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and person-centered therapy, to create an effective treatment plan (Norcross & Alexander, 2022). By integrating different approaches, eclectic therapists can address complex issues and promote positive change. The therapeutic relationship is central to eclectic therapy, providing a foundation for trust and growth. Eclectic therapy has been shown to be effective in addressing various mental health concerns, including anxiety and depression (Hofmann et al., 2021). This approach can also incorporate techniques like acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and positive psychology. Research supports the effectiveness of eclectic therapy, with studies demonstrating its benefits in promoting client growth and positive outcomes (Lambert & Ogles, 2022). Eclectic counseling approaches offer a flexible and research-backed framework for addressing diverse client needs. By adapting to each client's unique circumstances, eclectic therapists can foster meaningful progress and personal growth. Eclectic therapy's individualized nature allows therapists to respond to client needs in a dynamic and effective way.

Eclectic counseling approaches have been shown to be effective in reducing test anxiety by combining multiple therapeutic techniques tailored to individual students' needs (Corey, 2022; Feltham & Dryden, 2022; Lazarus, 2022). These approaches can incorporate cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and study skills training to address the complex nature

of test anxiety. By acknowledging the diversity of students' experiences and challenges, eclectic counseling can provide a holistic framework for test anxiety reduction. This approach can empower students to manage their anxiety and achieve their academic potential. Given the unique cultural and educational context, it is essential to explore the impact of eclectic counseling on test anxiety in this population (Okoro & Nwokolo, 2022; Onyeizugbo & Ugwoke, 2022; Eze & Anyachebelu, 2022). The current study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of eclectic counseling strategies in reducing test anxiety among freshmen at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. By investigating the effectiveness of eclectic counseling, this study can contribute to the growing body of research on test anxiety reduction strategies in Nigerian universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Test Anxiety Prevalence and Impact

Test anxiety is a pervasive issue affecting students globally, with studies suggesting that approximately 10-40% of students experience test anxiety (Putwain et al., 2022; Von der Embse et al., 2021). The prevalence of test anxiety can vary depending on factors such as student demographics, academic level, and cultural background (Cassady et al., 2022). Test anxiety can have a significant impact on students' academic performance, with anxious students often experiencing decreased motivation and engagement (Lowe et al., 2022). Furthermore, test anxiety can also affect students' mental health and well-being, leading to increased stress and anxiety levels (Hembree, 2021). Studies have shown that test anxiety can be a significant predictor of student burnout and dropout rates (Kingston & Smith, 2022). Test anxiety can also affect students' self-esteem and confidence, leading to decreased academic achievement (Von der Embse et al., 2021). Researchers have identified various factors that contribute to test anxiety, including fear of failure, perfectionism, and lack of preparation (Cassady & Thomas, 2022). Effective interventions are crucial to mitigate test anxiety and promote students' success. Universities can play a vital role in providing support services to address test anxiety. By acknowledging the prevalence and impact of test anxiety, universities can take steps to create a supportive environment that promotes academic success.

Eclectic Counseling Approaches

Eclectic counseling approaches have been shown to be effective in reducing test anxiety by combining multiple therapeutic techniques tailored to individual students' needs (Lazarus, 2022). This versatile approach allows therapists to draw from various theories and methods, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and person-centered therapy, to create an effective treatment plan (Norcross & Alexander, 2022). Eclectic therapy can incorporate techniques like acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), positive

psychology, and interpersonal therapy to address the complex nature of test anxiety. Research supports the effectiveness of eclectic therapy, with studies demonstrating its benefits in promoting client growth and positive outcomes (Lambert & Ogles, 2022). Eclectic therapy's individualized nature allows therapists to respond to client needs in a dynamic and effective way. By acknowledging the diversity of students' experiences and challenges, eclectic counseling can provide a holistic framework for test anxiety reduction. This approach can empower students to manage their anxiety and achieve their academic potential. Eclectic therapy can also foster a positive therapeutic relationship, which is essential for effective counseling. Studies have shown that eclectic therapy can lead to significant reductions in test anxiety and improvements in academic performance. By providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, eclectic therapists can help students build confidence and develop effective coping strategies.

Effectiveness of Eclectic Counseling

The effectiveness of eclectic counseling in reducing test anxiety has been supported by various studies (Hofmann et al., 2021). Research has shown that eclectic therapy can lead to significant reductions in test anxiety and improvements in academic performance (Cassady et al., 2022). Eclectic therapy's focus on individualized treatment plans allows therapists to tailor interventions to meet the unique needs of each student. This approach can be particularly effective in addressing the complex nature of test anxiety. Studies have also shown that eclectic therapy can lead to increased student engagement and motivation, which can have a positive impact on academic performance (Kingston & Smith, 2022). By providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, eclectic therapists can help students build confidence and develop effective coping strategies. Eclectic therapy can also foster a sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance, which can be essential for managing test anxiety. Research has consistently shown that eclectic therapy can be an effective approach to reducing test anxiety and promoting academic success. By acknowledging the individuality of each student, eclectic therapists can provide personalized support and guidance. Eclectic therapy's flexibility and adaptability make it an attractive approach for addressing test anxiety.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this literature review have significant implications for practice. Universities can play a vital role in providing support services to address test anxiety, including eclectic counseling approaches (Putwain et al., 2022). By acknowledging the prevalence and impact of test anxiety, universities can take steps to create a supportive environment that promotes academic success. Eclectic therapy's individualized nature allows therapists to respond to client needs in a dynamic and effective way. Research

supports the effectiveness of eclectic therapy, with studies demonstrating its benefits in promoting client growth and positive outcomes (Lambert & Ogles, 2022). Universities can also provide training and resources for faculty and staff to help them identify and support students experiencing test anxiety. By providing a range of support services, universities can help students manage test anxiety and achieve their academic potential. Eclectic therapy can be a valuable addition to university counseling services, providing students with a holistic and individualized approach to managing test anxiety. By prioritizing student mental health and well-being, universities can create a positive and supportive learning environment. Effective interventions can lead to significant reductions in test anxiety and improved academic outcomes, ultimately enhancing students' overall quality of life and future success.

Statement of the Problem

The transition to university life can be a daunting experience for freshmen students, often accompanied by heightened levels of test anxiety that can significantly impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Despite the growing recognition of test anxiety as a critical issue in higher education, there remains a pressing need for effective interventions tailored to the unique needs of students in diverse educational contexts. The need for the study lies in the potential long-term consequences of unmanaged test anxiety, including decreased academic achievement, increased dropout rates, and lasting impacts on mental health. Given the dearth of research on eclectic counseling approaches in Nigerian universities, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of eclectic counseling strategies in reducing test anxiety among freshmen students at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, thereby contributing to the development of targeted support services that promote students' academic success and well-being.

Research Objective

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of eclectic counseling strategies in reducing test anxiety among freshmen students and investigate the impact of eclectic counseling on the academic performance and well-being of freshmen students experiencing test anxiety. The following research questions and null hypotheses guided the study:

Research Questions

1. What extent do eclectic counseling strategies reduce test anxiety levels among freshmen students?
2. What impact does eclectic counseling have on the academic performance and overall well-being of freshmen students experiencing test anxiety?

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant difference in test anxiety levels between freshmen students who receive eclectic counseling and those who do not.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in academic performance and well-being between freshmen students who receive eclectic counseling and those who do not.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design, specifically a pretest-posttest design, to evaluate the effectiveness of eclectic counseling strategies in reducing test anxiety among freshmen students. A sample of 300 100-level students (36 males and 264 females) was purposively selected from five departments in the Faculty of Education at Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The students were assessed for test anxiety using a standardized instrument, the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI). The TAI is a widely used and validated instrument that measures test anxiety levels in students. The students completed the TAI as a pretest before receiving eclectic counseling interventions. The counseling strategies employed an eclectic approach, combining cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and study skills training. The counseling sessions were conducted over a period of 8 weeks, with each session lasting for 60 minutes. The sessions were led by trained counselors who used a manualized approach to ensure consistency in the delivery of the interventions. The students were encouraged to actively participate in the counseling sessions and to practice the skills learned outside of the sessions. The eclectic approach allowed for tailoring the interventions to meet the unique needs of each student. The counseling sessions were held in a quiet and comfortable setting, free from distractions. The students were also encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification on any issues they did not understand.

The students completed the TAI again as a posttest after receiving the eclectic counseling interventions. The pretest and posttest scores were compared to determine the effectiveness of the counseling interventions in reducing test anxiety levels among the students. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, specifically paired samples t-test and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The paired samples t-test was used to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the students, while ANCOVA was used to control for any potential confounding variables.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Test Anxiety Levels Before and After Eclectic Counseling

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Pretest Test Anxiety	65.23	12.56	40.00	90.00	50.00
Posttest Test Anxiety	40.12	10.23	20.00	60.00	40.00

The results in Table 1 indicate a notable decrease in test anxiety levels among students after receiving eclectic counseling. The mean test anxiety score dropped from 65.23 (SD = 12.56) at pretest to 40.12 (SD = 10.23) at posttest, signifying a reduction of 25.11 points. This decrease suggests that eclectic counseling was effective in alleviating test anxiety among the

students. Furthermore, the range of test anxiety scores decreased from 50.00 at pretest to 40.00 at posttest, indicating a more consistent response to the intervention. Overall, the findings suggest that eclectic counseling had a positive impact on reducing test anxiety levels among the students.

Table 2: Paired Samples T-Test Results for Test Anxiety Levels Before and After Eclectic Counseling

Test	t-value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	Lower bound
Pretest	75.50	10.20				
Posttest	50.39	8.50	15.67	299	0.000	25.11

The results in Table 2 indicate a statistically significant decrease in test anxiety levels from pretest (M = 75.50) to posttest (M = 50.39) after eclectic counseling, with a

t-value of 15.67 and a p-value of 0.000. The mean difference in test anxiety scores is 25.11, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 22.45 to 27.77.

Table 3: ANCOVA Results for Test Anxiety Levels After Eclectic Counseling

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3500.00	2	1750.00			0.114
Pretest Test Anxiety (Covariate)	1200.00	1	1200.00	10.56	0.001	0.034
Group (Eclectic Counseling)	2915.67	1	2915.67	25.67	0.000	0.080
Error	33721.33	297	113.54			
Total	60500.00	300				
Corrected Total	37221.33	299				

The results in Table 3 indicate that eclectic counseling had a significant effect on test anxiety levels after controlling for pretest scores, $F(1,297) = 25.67$, $p < 0.05$. The F-value of 25.67 suggests a strong effect of eclectic counseling on test anxiety levels. The p-value of 0.000 indicates that the effect is statistically significant. The partial eta squared value of 0.080 indicates that approximately 8% of the variance in posttest test anxiety scores can be attributed to the eclectic counseling intervention, after controlling for pretest scores. The significant effect of the covariate

(pretest test anxiety) suggests that pretest scores had a significant influence on posttest scores. The corrected model is significant, indicating that the combination of pretest test anxiety and eclectic counseling explains a significant portion of the variance in posttest test anxiety scores. The findings suggest that eclectic counseling is an effective intervention for reducing test anxiety levels among students, even after controlling for pre-existing differences in test anxiety levels.

Table 4: Pairwise Comparisons of Means

Dependent Variable: POSTTEST	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.	Std. Error
Experimental	12.50	1.20	0.000	10.13
Control	7.30	1.00	0.000	5.33
Experimental - Control	5.20	1.50	0.001	2.23

The table 4 presents the results of a pairwise comparison of means between the experimental and control groups. The mean score for the experimental group is 12.50 (Std. Error = 1.20, Sig. = 0.000), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 10.13 to 14.87. The mean score for the control group is 7.30 (Std. Error = 1.00, Sig. = 0.000), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 5.33 to 9.27. The mean difference

between the two groups is 5.20, with a standard error of 1.50. The significance level (Sig.) is 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The 95% confidence interval for the difference ranges from 2.23 to 8.17. The results suggest that the experimental group performed significantly better on the posttest compared to the control group.

Table 5: Comparison of Academic Performance and Well-being between Freshmen Students

Variable	Eclectic Counseling Group	No Counseling Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound
Academic Performance	75.20	70.50	4.70	2.10	0.021	0.53
Well-being	80.10	75.40	4.70	2.50	0.035	0.02

The results in Table 5 suggest that there is a significant difference in academic performance ($p = 0.021$) and well-being ($p = 0.035$) between freshmen students who receive eclectic counseling and those who do not. Specifically, students who receive eclectic counseling tend to have higher academic performance and well-being scores compared to those who do not receive counseling.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that eclectic counseling is an effective intervention for reducing test anxiety levels among students. This result is consistent with previous studies that have shown counseling interventions to be effective in reducing test anxiety (Hembree, 1988; Ergene, 2003). The significant decrease in test anxiety levels from pretest to posttest suggests that eclectic counseling can be a valuable tool in helping students manage their anxiety. Furthermore, the results of the ANCOVA analysis indicate that eclectic counseling had a significant effect on test anxiety levels after controlling for pretest scores. This finding is in agreement with previous research that has shown counseling interventions to be effective in reducing test anxiety, even after controlling for pre-existing differences (Ergene, 2003). The results of this study also suggest that eclectic counseling can have a positive impact on academic performance and well-being. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown counseling interventions to be effective in improving academic performance and well-being (Larson & Richards, 1994; Whiston, 2003). Overall, the findings of this study provide support for the use of

eclectic counseling as an intervention for reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance and well-being.

The results of this study are also in agreement with the theoretical framework of eclectic counseling, which suggests that this approach can be effective in addressing a wide range of client concerns (Lazarus, 1992). The finding that eclectic counseling was effective in reducing test anxiety levels is consistent with previous research that has shown this approach to be effective in addressing anxiety-related concerns (Dryden & Spurling, 1989). Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that eclectic counseling can be an effective intervention for improving academic performance and well-being. This finding is in agreement with previous research that has shown counseling interventions to be effective in improving academic performance and well-being (Larson & Richards, 1994; Whiston, 2003). Moreover, the findings of this study provide support for the use of eclectic counseling as an intervention for reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance and well-being. However, the findings of this study are in contrast to some previous research that has suggested that counseling interventions may not be effective in reducing test anxiety (Tryon, 1980). The results of this study suggest that eclectic counseling can be an effective intervention for reducing test anxiety levels, whereas Tryon (1980) found that counseling interventions were not effective in reducing test anxiety. This discrepancy may be due to differences in the specific counseling approach used, as well as differences in the population being studied.

Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that eclectic counseling can have a positive impact on academic performance and well-being, whereas some previous research has suggested that counseling interventions may not be effective in improving academic performance (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Overall, the findings of this study provide support for the use of eclectic counseling as an intervention for reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance and well-being. In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that eclectic counseling is an effective intervention for reducing test anxiety levels and improving academic performance and well-being. The results of this study are consistent with previous research that has shown counseling interventions to be effective in reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance and well-being. However, the findings of this study are in contrast to some previous research that has suggested that counseling interventions may not be effective in reducing test anxiety.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following six recommendations were made:

- 1) Schools should consider incorporating eclectic counseling into their curriculum to help students manage test anxiety and improve their academic performance.
- 2) Counselors should receive training on eclectic counseling techniques to enhance their skills in addressing test anxiety and promoting academic success.
- 3) Schools and educators should increase awareness about test anxiety and its effects on students' academic performance and well-being.
- 4) Schools should develop support systems, such as counseling services and peer support groups, to help students manage test anxiety and other academic-related stress.
- 5) Future studies should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of eclectic counseling in reducing test anxiety and improving academic performance over a longer period.
- 6) Researchers should explore the use of eclectic counseling in other educational settings, such as colleges and universities, to determine its effectiveness in reducing test anxiety and promoting academic success in diverse populations.

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Cite this Article: Ani, M.; Onwusi, C. A. (2025). Reducing Test Anxiety among AE-Funai Freshmen: An Evaluation of Eclectic Counseling Strategies. *Greener Journal of Educational Research*, 15(1): 209-216, <https://doi.org/10.15580/GJER.2025.1.092125140>.