

THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF TEST ANXIETY AMONG SECONDARY-LEVEL
STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Durga Kafle* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in English Language Education* presented on 5 February 2025, entitled *The Nature and Cause of Test Anxiety Among Secondary Level Students*.

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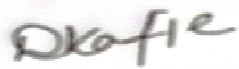
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Examinations tend to induce a lot of tension and anxiety in students of all ages because of the pressure of fulfilling self-expectations, parental expectations, and societal pressures. This thesis entitled "Nature and Causes of Examination Anxiety Among Secondary Level Students," using qualitative descriptive phenomenology, explores the multifaceted phenomenon of anxiety experienced by secondary-level students in writing English examinations. The study delineates the intricate interconnection between anxiety and its physical, psychological, and cognitive manifestations and how it exhibits the intricacy of test anxiety.

The research points towards internal causative aspects, including fear of failure, low self-esteem, and denial of one's language proficiency, along with external ones, including peer pressure, pressure from parents, and teacher reward schemes. These interact to fuel the students' experience and behavior. The participants provide instances of internalized thoughts and tales through relationship formation, such as complaints of headaches leading to the exam excessive worry and suicidal thoughts thereafter.

The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of anxiety among students concerning the physical, psychological, and cognitive realms. The research entails the potential to be important for teaching professionals and learning institutions to become worried about plans and solutions for resilience and upgrading students' mental health. By illustrating the actual experiences of the participants, the research gives real guidance

to educators, parents, and policymakers who are determined to create a stress-free and caring learning environment. The research aims to stimulate a broader understanding of students instead of concentrating on their performance and the reasons behind examination anxiety.



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Durga Kafle

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5 February 2025

शोध सार

अंग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीको लागि दुर्गा काफ्लेको शोध प्रबन्धको शिर्षक " माध्यमिक स्तरका विद्यार्थीहरूमा परीक्षा चिन्ताको प्रकृति र कारणहरू " २३ माघ २०८१ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

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सह. प्रा. खगेन्द्र आचार्य, पीएचडी

शोध निर्देशक

परीक्षाको दौरान विद्यार्थीहरूले अनुभव गर्ने तनाव र चिन्ता, उनीहरूले आफू, अभिभावक र समाजको अपेक्षाहरू पूरा गर्नुपर्ने दबाबका कारण उत्पन्न हुने एक जटिल समस्या हो। यस शोधले माध्यमिक तहका विद्यार्थीहरूले अङ्ग्रेजी लिखित परीक्षा दिने क्रममा अनुभव गर्ने चिन्ताको बहुआयामिक पक्षलाई गुणात्मक प्रपञ्चशास्त्रीय विधि प्रयोग गरी विश्लेषण गरेको छ।

यस अध्ययनले चिन्ताका शारीरिक, मानसिक र संज्ञानात्मक आयामहरू बीचको अन्तरसम्बन्धलाई उजागर गर्दै परीक्षा चिन्ताको जटिलतालाई स्पष्ट पार्दछ। अनुसन्धानले विद्यार्थीहरूमा परीक्षा चिन्ता उत्पन्न गर्ने आन्तरिक कारणहरू (असफलताको डर, आत्म-सम्मानको कमी, भाषा दक्षताको कमी) र बाह्य कारणहरू (साथीभाइको दबाब, अभिभावकको अपेक्षा, शिक्षकको पुरस्कार प्रणाली) लाई पहिचान गरेको छ। यी कारणहरूले विद्यार्थीहरूको अनुभव र व्यवहारमा गहिरो प्रभाव पार्दछन्।

सहभागीहरूले साक्षात्कारका माध्यमबाट आफ्ना अनुभवहरू व्यक्त गरे, जसमा शारीरिक लक्षणहरू (टाउको दुख्ने), मानसिक तनाव (अत्यधिक चिन्ता) र गम्भीर अवस्थामा संज्ञानात्मक विचलन (आत्महत्याको विचार) सम्मका समस्याहरू समावेश थिए।

यस अनुसन्धानले विद्यार्थीहरूको चिन्ताका शारीरिक, मानसिक र संज्ञानात्मक पक्षहरूको विस्तृत बुझाइ प्रदान गर्दछ। यसले शिक्षण व्यवसायी र शिक्षण संस्थाहरूलाई विद्यार्थीहरूको मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सुधारका लागि योजना र समाधानहरू विकास गर्न प्रेरित गर्दछ। सहभागीहरूको वास्तविक अनुभवलाई प्रस्तुत गरेर, यो अध्ययनले शिक्षाकर्मी, अभिभावक र नीतिनिर्माताहरूलाई तनावमुक्त र सहयोगी सिकाइ वातावरण निर्माण गर्न मार्गदर्शन प्रदान गर्दछ। यस अनुसन्धानको मुख्य उद्देश्य विद्यार्थीहरूको शैक्षिक प्रदर्शनभन्दा पनि उनीहरूको समग्र बुझाइलाई प्रवर्द्धन गर्नु र परीक्षा चिन्ताका मूल कारणहरूलाई सम्बोधन गर्नु हो ।

Durga

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दुर्गा काफ्ले
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२३ माघ २०८१

This dissertation entitled *The Nature and Causes of Test Anxiety among Secondary Level Students* presented by Durga Kafle on 5 February, 2025.

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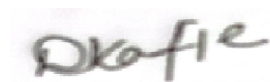
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I understand that my dissertation will be a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.



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5 February 2025

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my loving parents, whose constant support, encouragement, and pride have been the foundation of my academic journey. Your belief in me has been a source of strength, and this accomplishment reflects your endless love and sacrifices.

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ABBREVIATIONS

TA	Test Anxiety
TP	Test Pressure
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
CBT	Cognitive Behavioral Theory
EFL	English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a complex process, influenced and modified by many linguistic and non-linguistic factors that facilitate or hinder students' progress. Though linguistic aspects like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation play a very important role, non-linguistic elements, particularly psychological issues, affect students' performances largely, especially regarding written tests. Out of these non-linguistic factors, one of the prime causes of disturbance in students' performance is test anxiety. Test anxiety is the apprehension and uneasiness during examinations, including symptoms like nervousness, tension, racing thoughts, and physical discomfort that make students incapable of performing well (Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Zeidner, 1998). This study will look at the type and causes of anxiety manifestation among students and how psychological factors influence academic performance. Recognizing the prevalence and impact of test anxiety on English language learners, I am motivated to investigate this phenomenon further. The idea to research this issue emerged as a means to shed light on the learners' experiences and gain valuable insights into their challenges. The study aims to gather and analyze firsthand accounts from students who grapple with test anxiety in the English language. This qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of the psychological and emotional struggles that the students encounter during exams, elucidating the extent to which test anxiety influences their performance.

This study holds the potential to contribute to the broader field of language acquisition research. Shedding light on the interplay between psychological factors and language learning adds depth and nuance to our understanding of the complexities involved in the process. This knowledge can inform the development of more effective teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and assessment practices that account for the psychological well-being of learners. It highlights the importance of addressing students' emotional and psychological needs in language education, recognizing that a holistic approach is necessary to foster optimal learning outcomes.

In conclusion, psychological issues, including anxieties, substantially influence the performance of English language learners, particularly in written tests. This study's findings can inform educational practices, interventions, and support

systems, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective language learning environment (Horowitz, 2001; Young, 1991). Furthermore, it holds the potential to advance the broader field of language acquisition research, deepening our understanding of the intricate relationship between psychology and language learning (Horowitz, 2001).

This chapter presents the introduction, study context, rationale, purpose, problem statement, delimitation, and research gap. The introduction section describes the challenges that arise in teaching English, and the context describes the event that played a crucial role in making me think about how the students' learning outcomes can relate to psychological issues.

Context of the Study

Teaching English is always a challenging job. A teacher has to face various challenges. I started my teaching career as a primary-level English teacher 13 years ago. During my journey, sometimes my parents badly scolded me; some days were too critical due to my incoming; and sometimes I felt stress and pressure due to the student's performance. Yet, it has been a fantastic journey, and I have been going through many exciting events. However, some events in life are always memorable, and some have changed my perspectives on teaching English.

One of the most memorable events in my life happened some years before. It was the year 2017, and the month was March. I had joined an institutionalized school as a secondary-level English teacher. As I had just joined the school, I did not know about the background of the student's knowledge of English grammar. The season was going to end. As I was teaching English grammar in class nine, not the specific topic but a revision of all basic grammar, I found one boy very active compared to others. He participated in every discussion and performed very well in English class. His classroom performance affected me so much that I was sure he would score the highest marks in English. Following their examinations, I was very excited to check the answer sheets because that was my new job in a new place. Mainly, I was more excited to check that boy's paper. When I checked his answers, I was shocked. He couldn't even score half of the total marks. So, I called him and asked how his exam went, then asked him all the same questions in the exam. To my surprise, he answered all of them. Later, I talked with his mother and found out why he had performed poorly in my subject. He had a fever besides suffering from diarrhea. He was so stressed by it. The more astounding fact is that before every terminal exam, fever,

extreme headaches, or worse, befalls him. Come Finals, it becomes worse. This problem has bothered him not only now but since he was in primary school.

The next day, thinking a lot about the problem of this particular student, I decided to visit some other classes and talked with my colleagues about those students whose parents frequently reported that their sons and daughters had frequently been suffering from headaches, fever, diarrhea, and any other diseases during the time of examination. The result was surprising; in every class, some students were found to have the problem of being anxious and depressed, suffering from headaches and fever, especially at the time of examination. So many questions rose in my mind. Do the students have any psychological issues with the examination? Do they have a fear of questions asked on the tests? Is our policy of examining students friendly? How does the family treat the students when they know they are performing nicely in the classroom but cannot get a good score? Are families aware of their wards' anxiety during the time of the test? Are teachers creating a friendly environment for students in the examination hall? Are the infrastructures supportive or comfortable for the students? How can we help students who suffer psychologically during examinations?

After that, I began to study the psychological issues relating to test anxiety. I began to read different research papers, articles, and books to research anxiety among students.

Hidden Struggles of Test Anxiety in Students

Examination stress and anxiety have become pertinent issues in the modern world, affecting a significant number of students. According to Chapell et al., "Test anxiety is a maladaptive stress response triggered by academic assessments, involving cognitive interference (e.g., task-irrelevant thinking), emotional distress, and avoidance behaviors, which collectively impair learning and test-taking efficiency. This definition is supported by Jaradat (2013), who suggests that test anxiety is a problem commonly experienced by students, with some individuals experiencing severe impacts on their grades.

The prevalence of anxiety and examination stress among modern students highlights the need for psychiatrists and counselors to be aware of these situations. Rozental (2014) argues that stress and anxiety not only hinder performance but are also associated with poorer mental health. Individuals who procrastinate recurrently often experience stress, worry, and feelings of guilt. These factors contribute to the overall burden of examination stress. Furthermore, the use of assessments in modern

society has contributed to the growth of test anxiety (TA) and test pressure (TP) as significant problems. According to Dawadi (2021), TA is an intense psychological state in which test takers experience stress and fear when evaluating their performance and the potential consequences. TP refers to a situation in which students feel compelled to work hard for a test, often due to external pressures such as expectations from teachers, parents, or peers. The prevalence of both TA and TP underscores the importance of addressing examination stress and anxiety as crucial issues affecting students' well-being and academic performance. In conclusion, stress and anxiety are widespread problems in the modern world. Students frequently experience test anxiety, which can have a significant impact on their grades. Stress, worry, and guilt are commonly associated with procrastination, further adding to the burden of examination stress. Uncertainty about exam content contributes to the anxiety experienced by students. Moreover, the widespread use of assessments has led to the growth of test anxiety and test pressure as significant concerns among students. Psychiatrists and counselors should be aware of these issues and work towards supporting students in managing examination stress and anxiety effectively.

Concerning these points above, we come to the point that most students suffer from stress during and before the examination, and if their stress and pressure impact their performance, that can be defined as test or examination anxiety. Moreover, Bhatta et al. (2018) found that “test anxiety interacts with many other variables like academic achievements, motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence and adjustment. (p75-78)” Here, it is discussed that test anxiety is connected with other different variables like the achievements of the students, students’ emotional adjustments and their intelligence, self-respect, etc. Likewise, Hanfesa et al. (2020) presented their view that test anxiety is the condition of stress and anxiety due to the fear and stress of examinations, and it is the psychological condition of the students. In support of this claim, Hardacre and Guvendir (2020) claimed that “when students were asked about test anxiety, the themes that emerged were writing anxiety, test anxiety, and math anxiety, as a barrier to future employment. (p1-6)” Students generally hesitate to speak about an issue like anxiety, but they are suffering from it internally, and it affects their achievements in different fields. In supporting the same opinion, Paul and Eriksson (1964) claimed that every professor is familiar with the complaints of some students who claim to know the subject matter well but are so anxious during examinations that they cannot call forth their knowledge. Furthermore,

Utami et al. (2023) found that the multiple-choice anxiety level was higher than the matching test, although the difference was minimal. So, educators should be concerned while constructing the test. Educators have difficulty deciding the quality of the test construct, which is influential in student decisions. (p30)

So, many students can be anxious during examinations, and this stress can directly impact their learning. By supporting the same claim, Alemu & Feyssa (2020), had a view that,

Anxiety is a kind of self-preoccupation that is manifested as self-minimization and results in negative cognitive evaluation, lack of concentration, unfavorable psychological reactions, and academic failure. This study examined the relationships between test anxiety and academic achievement among secondary school students. (p.540)

Moreover, Hassan and Ravi (2022) argued that,

There is severe competition among students since the number of places in these educational institutions is fewer than the number of students. Therefore, parents recommend that their children perform well in the first board examination, and, to this end, they may appoint three to four private tutors or more for special guidance. (p.14)

Based on the ideas presented by the above researcher, it can be said that when students suffer from anxiety relating to tests, it certainly affects their performance of the students. So, I would like to research this issue related to testing anxiety and how it affects or influences the performance among secondary-level students in English. So, I would like to research this associated with the psychological issue of test anxiety and how it affects or influences the performance among secondary-level students in English.

Rationale of the Study

Examinations help teachers understand how much a student has grasped and learned. Unfortunately, because of this wide problem, most students cannot achieve their desired goals in examinations. Erözkan et al. (2017) highlighted that middle school students have bleak future outlooks with adverse effects in various educational stages. Although these are new research areas, like test anxiety concerning students' lives and the pressures exerted by family relations on high school students, much more attention seems to be devoted to these issues. This paper examines the nature and causes of examination anxiety, particularly among secondary-level students in

English exams, to determine what factors lead to this condition and what methods can be utilized for relief. This will provide a chance to design better academic experiences and performances among the students.

Anxiety is a prevalent issue that impacts students and extends its influence on their family relationships as well. Numerous studies have emphasized the detrimental effects of anxiety on academic performance and highlighted the various ways in which it manifests in students' lives. Dawood et al. (2016) assert that anxiety is a widespread problem that contributes to poor academic performance among children globally. The researchers argue that anxiety leads to negative cognitive appraisal, resulting in a lack of focus, adverse physiological reactions, and, ultimately, academic failure. When students are plagued by anxiety, they become preoccupied with their self-minimization, making it challenging for them to concentrate on their studies and perform to the best of their abilities. The impact of anxiety on students' performance is not limited to their academic achievements alone. It also extends to their experiences within the realm of assessments and evaluations. Steinmayr et al. (2016) specifically highlight the influence of test anxiety on students' abilities and achievements. Test anxiety, a form of anxiety explicitly experienced during exams and assessments, can have a direct effect on students' performance outcomes. The fear of failure, excessive worry, and apprehension associated with test anxiety can impair students' cognitive functioning, making it difficult for them to demonstrate their true capabilities. Moreover, anxiety can also have indirect effects on students' performance and well-being. The burden of anxiety can spill over into students' personal lives and impact their family relationships. The constant worry and stress experienced by students may create tension within the family environment as they struggle to cope with the pressures of their academic responsibilities. This can lead to strained communication, decreased emotional support, and a general deterioration in family dynamics. It is crucial to recognize that the effects of anxiety on students' performance are often underestimated or misunderstood. Students may internalize their anxiety, making it challenging for teachers, parents, and even themselves to identify the underlying causes of their academic struggles. This lack of awareness further perpetuates the negative cycle, as the root causes of poor performance remain unaddressed.

To comprehensively explore this topic, the study employs various research methodologies. A qualitative method is utilized to gather data from a diverse sample

of students. Interviews aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the causes and effects of anxiety in the context of examinations. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of this complex issue by employing a multi-faceted approach. The findings of this research will have some implications for educational institutions and stakeholders. By highlighting the prevalence of anxiety and stress among students, the study advocates for the implementation of proactive measures to address these issues. It underscores the importance of incorporating mental health support within the educational system and emphasizes the need for early intervention and prevention strategies. Moreover, the study seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge in psychology and education. Exploring students' specific challenges during examination periods provides valuable insights that can inform future research and intervention programs. This research can serve as a foundation for developing targeted interventions and support systems that are tailored to the unique needs of students experiencing examination-related anxiety.

In conclusion, this study focused on satisfying the thirst for knowledge surrounding the experiences of students grappling with anxiety and stress during examinations. Increasing awareness among educators, teachers, and parents strives to create a supportive and anxiety-free student environment. Through comprehensive research methodologies, the study intends to shed light on the causes and effects of examination-related anxiety, aiming to improve students' well-being and academic performance. By addressing this critical issue, the study seeks to positively impact the lives of students, educators, and parents alike.

The abovementioned research shows that there is a significant relationship between psychology and the cognitive process of learners. The score is affected if the student is stressed during, before, and after the test or examination, though he has good knowledge of the subject matter. However, due to ignorance of the issues, many parents blame their children for not scoring good results, and many learners are unaware of their problems. They are confused and stressed because they do not manage their stress. The student, examiner, teacher, and policyholder are unaware of this psyche and are not creating a stressful and anxiety-free environment for the test taker.

Statement of the Problem

Students spend months studying the English language curriculum and appear in final examinations. Understandably, they expect to pass the examinations with

good marks. But, they find the day of the examination quite different than their expectation. Why does this happen? Various factors contribute to poor English students' performance, though non-linguistic and psychological factors have keenly been observed. Major challenges are that learners have different learning modes and aptitudes. Different learners have different styles of comprehension and processing of information. Some may be good in aural and oral skills, while others might be poor in reading and writing.

Moreover, there are complexities in language learning as a procedure that requires time and practice. The students may take time to acquire a certain concept or skill about a language. However, in the educational systems nowadays, much emphasis is placed on examinations and grades, which could be regretfully at the cost of producing students who are all-round knowledgeable and skilled in languages. This may only add to the anxiety and stress of learners and make them further behind. Another point is that learning English is also influenced by cultural and social factors. Learners from culturally different backgrounds face problems assimilating the new language into their cultural schema. They may feel a conflict about their identity or be afraid of making mistakes in the pronunciation of English. Such apprehensions could be dispelled by a positive learning environment, including an inclusive classroom atmosphere embracing cultural differences.

Issues Relating to Examinations

The classroom environment in Nepalese schools tends to be heavily exam-oriented, with a strong focus on achieving high scores rather than nurturing holistic language proficiency. This exam-centric approach can inadvertently hinder students' overall language development. Consequently, students may struggle to perform well on written English tests, as these assessments primarily assess their ability to recall and reproduce information rather than fostering critical thinking, creativity, and effective communication. Moreover, psychological factors can significantly impact students' English language performance. Anxiety, for instance, can undermine students' confidence and impede their ability to express themselves in English effectively. Fear of making mistakes, social pressure, and self-doubt can hinder students' progress and their willingness to participate in language activities actively. Consequently, even students with the necessary linguistic knowledge may struggle to perform optimally due to psychological barriers.

According to Rana and Mahmood (2010), test anxiety is a major factor in students' poor performance and underachievement. This situation can be appropriately managed when students are instructed on various ways of dealing with hidden sources of test anxiety. Expanding on this, Cassady (2004) points out that the issues concerning test anxiety and the consequences for students have been of high interest to researchers. On the one hand, many students are struggling with stress and anxiety before and during examinations. These affect their performances. Along the same line, Burgucu et al. (2011) mention that various factors such as intelligence, motivation, attitude, and anxiety take the stage when learning a foreign language. Anxiety, in this respect, becomes one of the pivotal elements in learning a foreign language.

The schools have different perspectives on examinations, primarily focused on their purpose and objectives. On the one hand, numerous institutions deem examinations and assessments the best approach to discern the student's loopholes and potential. In contrast, others consider examinations the only driving force behind students' success. The worry of testing and exertion in school might directly affect student grades, given that these seem to be high-stakes assessments (Jerrim, 2023). This study focuses on the nature and causes of the problem of examination anxiety in English among secondary students. It examines if teachers are creating student-positive environments in assessment halls and if existing examination policies are conducive to students' well-being.

This research investigated anxiety and its causes among the students of these schools. It finds out how the examination policies, the environment of examinations, and teachers' behaviors add to students' anxiety. The study also probed into the family responses towards students' performance discrepancies and their awareness regarding the stress and anxiety faced by students. It assessed the adequacy and comfort of infrastructures meant for conducting the examinations. The study also identified methods to help students with psychological distress during examinations. By addressing these factors, the research seeks to provide an all-rounded understanding of examination anxiety and its impacts on secondary-level students. The study addressed these questions to provide insights into the nature of examination anxiety and the potential for interventions that may help reduce this issue for secondary-level students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of anxiety among secondary-level students in the written examination of English and to explore the elements that cause test anxiety in written tests in English among secondary-level students.

Research Questions

This study has the following two research questions.

1. What is the nature of students' anxiety?
2. What elements cause anxiety in a written examination of English among secondary-level students?

Delimitation

This study examines test anxiety during written English tests, specifically among secondary-level students. It does not encompass other subjects that are taught in English medium. While test anxiety can manifest in various subjects and age groups, this research has specifically concentrated on the experiences of secondary-level students with their written English assessments.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study follows the linear framework starting from the chapter first, an introduction of the research work along with the context of the study and rationale, followed by a problem statement and research questions. Chapter two deals with the overview of literature related to language testing and the psychological issues that will be presented. Chapter Three discusses the Philosophical consideration and the research method. This chapter also discussed the research paradigm, participants, data collection procedure, and analyzing procedures of data stepwise of data. Moreover, this chapter deals briefly with ethical considerations and quality standards. Chapter four explores the brief description of the narratives and the lived experiences along with the participants' stories. The interview transcripts will be analyzed, and themes, keywords, and concepts will be discussed. Finally, the quest for meaning continues with the help of analyzed themes and derived interpretations from the participants' lived experiences.

Chapter Summary

Teaching English as a foreign language is equally challenging and an opportunity-rich task for teachers. Learning a new language is a complex cognitive process that can be potentially affected by psychological factors, such as stress and

anxiety. This chapter presented the context, and the study was introduced in detail to set the basis for this research. The study's rationale was also given, and there was a core explanation for why it has been vital to understand how psychological issues influence language learning. The purpose of the study put into proper perspective outlined the need to determine the relationship between stress, anxiety, and second language acquisition. By delving into this topic, researchers aim to gain valuable insights into how these psychological factors affect the learning process and identify potential strategies to mitigate their negative impact. Understanding the role of stress and anxiety in language learning is crucial for educators and policymakers, as it can inform the development of effective teaching methods and support systems.

These research questions are framed to guide the study in addressing specific areas of inquiry. In this respect, the questions have laid down a data collection and analysis framework that will enable researchers to delve deep into the complexities of stress and anxiety within the context of second language acquisition. This concerns the subtlety in the psychological burden that besets the language learner and the probable interventions to be enlightened toward the betterment of their learning process. Additionally, the chapter has given the delimitations of the study, which would particularly pinpoint the boundaries and limitations within which the research must be conducted. Delimitation helps in the scope of the study, which identifies clarity concerning the population under study, context, and timeframe.

The present research about stress and anxiety within the context of second language acquisition is based on the following structure: Introduction, setting, and justification of the relevance of the psychological phenomenon that influences language learning; objectives of the paper, to which respective research questions are linked, enabled the orientation of the study to pinpoint valuable information about the issue. Besides this, the delimitations were forwarded to explain what the study will cover and what it will not. With this extensive introduction, the platform would now be set for a detailed analysis of the relationship between stress, anxiety, and the acquisition of English as a Second Language.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Test anxiety is a daily concern of students at academic and professional levels. In such conditions, tension, nervousness, and apprehension may develop one day or moment before or during the exam. As it affects a lot of individuals concerning academic, mental health, and psychological states, the concern of researchers, educators, and psychologists becomes serious. Test anxiety is complexly caused and reflects an interacting array of cognitive, affective, and physiological factors. Identifying the dimensions inherently necessitates intervention strategies or techniques that can effectively bring alleviation (Zeidner, 1998).

This review will give meaningful insight into the nature and etiology of test anxiety by considering these variables, hence casting light on its underlying mechanism and consequences for the sufferer. The literature review thus provides a foundation upon which future research into methods and treatments may be employed in reducing test anxiety, improving the health of school environments, and promoting the achievements of individuals afflicted by this common yet complex psychological affliction.

Anxiety: A Thematic Review

Anxiety refers to the displeasure, tension, fear, and depression that may be felt because of specific situations in which an individual could find themselves. Anxiety as a psychological topic is manifested emotionally, intellectually, and psychometrically. Anxiety has thus been studied under various perspectives regarding causality, manifestation, and its implications. According to the Encyclopedia of Psychology, “Anxiety is an emotion characterized by a feeling of tension, worried thoughts and physical change like increase in blood pressure (p....).” In the same manner, Moreno (2022) stated that anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) are the leading conditions contributing to that trend, accounting for nearly 60% of all mental health charges in the fiscal year 2021. (p)” Furthermore, Trivedi and Gupta (2010) reported, “anxiety is a normal human emotion. In moderation, anxiety stimulates an anticipatory and adaptive response to challenging or stressful

events". So, based on the above definition, we conclude that anxiety refers to the psychological feeling response to the environment of an individual.

Adaptive and Maladaptive Anxiety

Anxiety is an ordinary response to stress, with influences that could either be adaptive or maladaptive, depending on the way it comes out. Adaptive anxiety, therefore, can be a protector and a driving element, whereby these feelings make the person more watchful and readier for any event that might happen. For example, a student who is experiencing a moderate amount of anxiety over an impending exam will likely study more efficiently and do a better job on it. Also, an athlete nervous before a competition may just pay closer attention and do a better job. Anxiety of this kind is adaptive since it heightens problem-solving ability, produces caution in perilous situations, and raises productivity levels (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). It stops being adaptive when anxiety becomes disproportionate, irrational, or persistent; maladaptive anxiety interferes with daily functioning and general well-being. This may happen because, unlike in the case of adaptive anxiety, which is always proportionate to the situation, maladaptive anxiety often involves avoidance behaviors, excessive fear, and emotional distress. If that same student in the example feels such overwhelming anxiety at exams that he freezes up and can't remember what he studied, then his performance will suffer. Likewise, someone with social anxiety may avoid gatherings altogether, leading to isolation and a decline in self-confidence (Spielberger, 1972).

Emotional and Physiological Dimensions of Anxiety

The emotional and physiological dimensions include anxiety as the apprehensive emotion that is characterized by tensions and heightened physiologic response. According to the Encyclopedia of Psychology, "Anxiety is an emotion characterized by a feeling of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like an increase in blood pressure. These physiological responses have a survival purpose: priming the person to deal with stress by activating the "fight or flight" response. But in cases of persistent anxiety, it becomes crippling and overpowering. According to Trivedi and Gupta (2010), Anxiety is a particular human emotion. When anxiety is controlled, it encourages a proactive and flexible reaction to difficult or stressful situations. This perspective highlights the adaptive nature of anxiety, which may necessitate treatment when it becomes excessive.

Anxiety and Its Association with Mental Health Conditions

Anxiety more often occurs in tandem with other conditions of the mind, making it aggravated. According to Moreno (2022), anxiety and PTSD were almost 60% of the cases reported in 2021, hence indicating how prevalent the conditions are. This suggests a strong connection between anxiety and other disorders, such as PTSD and depression. Understanding the relationship between them is vital for comprehensive treatment and support programs as improvement in one could help reduce the others. Making such links will go a long way toward more effective integrated mental health approaches.

In conclusion, anxiety is complex and cognitive; by comprehending these aspects, researchers and practitioners were able to understand anxiety better, which in turn led to more effective support systems and therapies.

What is Test Anxiety?

The test is also an exam, *launch*, assessment, etc. While teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language, learners are taught four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. When an individual has fear, depression, less confidence, or discomfort with taking an examination, that can be known as test anxiety. Many researchers showed their interest and presented their views on this issue. Amalu (2017) stated his view as a physiological and psychological condition in which someone experiences extreme stress and anxiety during and or before taking a test. In supporting this view, Alemu (2020) claimed that “Anxiety is an emotional and behavioral disorder caused by the activation of the sympathetic nervous system. When students are faced with performance-related activities such as examinations, they tend to experience anxiety as a result of pressure and fear of failure. (p36)” Likewise, Marefat (2014) Claimed that “the study showed that both language anxiety and test anxiety were negatively related to foreign language test performance (p54)”.

So, if students feel stress and anxiety during or before the examination, their performance can be impacted. In supporting this view, Innami (2006) presented, after taking the performance test and answering two questionnaires intended to measure test anxiety. After the validity of the interference drawn from the questionnaires was checked, a model was constructed and analyzed using structural equation modeling to determine the relationship between test anxiety and test performance. In the same manner, Oliver (2016) claimed that anxiety is an emotionally evoking experience because feelings of embarrassment and even anger can surface during bouts of test anxiety. When a student starts experiencing anxiety, it distracts them from the task.

The learning outcome is always connected directly and indirectly with the psychology of the students. The examination is the main measure to measure the student's ability to learn and their achievements. The stress and pressure of examination can be a problem for the learner of any class and age group. The relationship between anxiety and student performance can be analyzed if we examine the research points mentioned above.

Theoretical Review

Theoretical frameworks provide a critical basis upon which anxiety-a complex emotional and psychological state that can have significant impacts on the well-being of an individual can be understood. Anxiety, in general, is a feeling of apprehension, worry, and fear based on cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors. Several psychological theories explain its origins and mechanisms. For instance, Beck's Cognitive Theory of Anxiety (Beck and Clark, 1997) focuses on negative thinking and cognitive distortions where a person overestimates the threat and underestimates their coping ability, thus resulting in increased anxiety. On the other hand, Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory (Freud, 1926) maintains that anxiety emanates from unconscious conflicts and repressed emotions; for this reason, unresolved inner struggles appear as anxious behaviors.

Examination anxiety has been a subject of much research interest, wherein various theories explain how the situation works and what its effects can be. Most important among these is the Cognitive Appraisal Theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. According to this theory, examination anxiety results from the individual's cognitive appraisal of the exam situation, which is perceived as stressful by taking the exam demands against one's coping resources. This theory postulates that students whose appraisals of the examination are threatening yet within their handling capacity experience lower anxiety, and those whose evaluation of an exam is seen to be beyond control present higher levels of anxiety. All in all, their cognitive appraisal, therefore, influences their emotional and physiological reactions and further progress.

The Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1977) suggests that the anxiety levels of a person may have been primarily modulated by his or her belief in self-efficacy. Thus, concerning examinations, it can be further elaborated that those who are high in self-efficacy, or confidence, in their academic capabilities will likely experience less anxiety since they can feel that they can meet the demand placed on them for

performance in each exam. On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy are more anxious due to doubting their capabilities and having poor performance expectations. This theory highlights the role of self-belief in managing examination anxiety and points out that increasing self-efficacy can be an effective intervention strategy.

The theories of examination anxiety have been variably used in educational contexts to help students manage their anxiety. The Cognitive Appraisal Theory has inspired mindfulness-based interventions to alter the students' appraisal of exam stress. Mindfulness practices help students develop awareness and acceptance of their thoughts and emotions; thus, there is a reduction of negative appraisals and the promotion of a more balanced response to exam stress. The work of Roose et al. (2021) evidences that such interventions would work effectively in reducing examination anxiety through changes in cognitive appraisals.

Of these theories on the examination of anxieties, the theory most related to the present research is the Cognitive Theory of Test Anxiety. Through this theory, it has directly been elaborated how negative thought patterns, self-doubt, and distorted cognition result in increasing anxiety in the students before and during their exams. Unlike other theories that are based on emotional regulation or beliefs in self, the Cognitive Theory specifically posits the role of cognitive processing in test performance and is thereby particularly helpful in explaining how students experience and manage examination stress.

Cognitive Theory of Test Anxiety

The cognitive theory of test anxiety, as inspired by Sarason in 1984 and later developed by Zeidner in 1998, is conceptually based on the assumption that test anxiety involves a basically cognitive problem and not just emotional or physiological reactions. According to this theory, anxious students develop negative automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and attentional biases, impeding their capability for appropriate focusing and recalling while taking an examination (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). One of the central assumptions is that highly test-anxious students use too much of their mental resources for thoughts of failure rather than engaging effectively with the test material (Zeidner & Matthews, 2005). A second critical assumption is that self-referential thinking, such as self-doubt and a fear of judgment, especially heightens anxiety and reduces performance efficiency (Putwain & Daly, 2013). These

assumptions place cognition at the forefront of the mechanism through which examination anxiety is developed and affects students' academic performance.

This test anxiety theory has been popularly used as part of many therapeutic interventions that are used during the process, like biofeedback and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for managing the cognition, emotion, and physiological problems experienced during tests. According to the Cognitive Theory of Test Anxiety, test anxiety can be reflected by the various types of distortion of cognition, negative emotional reactions, and physiologic states of increased heart rate, sweating, and muscular tension (Zeidner, 1998). CBT is one of the approaches that are meant to alter the cognitive component of test anxiety, through which a student learns how to identify negative thoughts that perpetuate anxiety, such as perceptions of failure or the belief that their self-worth is measured by academic achievement.

This, in turn, minimizes catastrophic thinking and self-doubt, which commonly emanate as cognitive causes of test anxiety (Sarason, 1984). By helping students reframe their thoughts and adopt a more realistic and constructive mindset, CBT not only alleviates anxiety but also improves their ability to focus and recall information during exams (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). Biofeedback also addresses the physiological responses of test anxiety and provides immediate, quantitative feedback on the physiological reactions of a student's heart rate and other measures of muscle tension during anxiety-provoking events. This biofeedback allows the student to recognize the association between their emotional arousal and physical responses and, more importantly, teaches them to control emotional arousal through various forms of relaxation, such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation (Putwain & Daly, 2013).

Empirical Review of Test Anxiety

Many researchers have studied the relationship between anxiety and the performance of students in different tests, exams, and assignments. The study carried out by Rodriguez-Arce et al. (2020) stated that physiological characteristics can be used to predict stress and anxiety in learning contexts. He studied twenty-one physiological characteristics of five signals, and a stress-inducing strategy was also presented. The results show that the automated classifiers (SVM and k-Nearest Neighbors) can differentiate between stress (>90%) and states of anxiety (>95%) using machine learning classifiers such as k-Nearest Neighbors and SVM. These results can be used to create such systems for identifying stress and anxiety to assist

students and teachers in enhancing their performances and eradicating academic conflicts and pressures. A similar study on test anxiety and academic performance was conducted by Hernández et al. (2020), which examined the correlation between anxiety and university students' academic success. Their findings indicated that anxiety negatively impacts students' ability to concentrate and perform well in written evaluations and oral presentations.

In the same manner, the study of Birjande and Alemi (2010) about the impact of anxiety on the academic performance of Iranian EFL learners found there is a correlation between anxiety and the academic performances of the students. Moreover, in the study carried out by Macdonald (2001) about the prevalence and effect of test anxiety in school children, it is found that the anxiety caused by nervousness and less preparation for examination on the students has negative effects on the academic outcomes of the students. Moreover, test anxiety indeed impacts the student's learning outcomes. Hong and Karstenson (2002) studied the antecedent of state test anxiety, which focused on the role of different variables on 298 college students and perceived test difficulties and test anxieties as worries and emotional stress during final examinations.

Examinations are known to elicit feelings of stress and anxiety among students, irrespective of their age or academic level. The impact of these psychological states on students' performance is a complex phenomenon that has been investigated in various studies. Aalam and Halder (2018) conducted research in West Bengal and discovered a conflicting relationship between anxiety and academic performance in secondary-level students. Their findings indicated that students experiencing high levels of worry tended to have lower achievement levels. Additionally, the study revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between students' adjustment and test anxiety. These findings support the notion that tests and anxiety are closely intertwined, influencing students' academic outcomes.

Furthermore, Sokmen (2013) explored the topic of speaking test anxiety in English as part of her thesis. Her research revealed that students often experience stress and anxiety due to various reasons, such as a lack of practice and preparation. These factors contribute to heightened levels of anxiety, ultimately exerting a negative impact on students' academic performance. Sokmen's findings align with the idea that anxiety can hinder students' abilities to perform well in examinations, particularly in language-related tasks such as speaking tests.

The studies conducted by Aalam and Halder (2018) and Sokmen (2013) shed light on the detrimental effects of anxiety on students' academic outcomes. Their research underscores the importance of understanding and addressing test anxiety to promote better performance among students. By recognizing the interconnectedness of tests and anxiety, educators and policymakers can develop interventions and support systems that help alleviate anxiety and enhance students' learning experiences. The findings of Aalam and Halder (2018) emphasize the need to provide students with strategies to manage anxiety effectively. Such interventions can empower students to mitigate the negative impact of anxiety on their academic performance. By addressing the underlying causes of anxiety and promoting healthy coping mechanisms, educators can create a supportive learning environment that fosters academic success.

Similarly, Sokmen's (2013) research highlights the significance of practice and preparation in reducing test anxiety. Educators can enhance students' confidence and reduce their anxiety levels by equipping students with the necessary skills and resources, such as mock exams and targeted practice sessions. Additionally, providing students with guidance and support in developing effective study habits and time management skills can contribute to alleviating anxiety and improving academic outcomes. In addition, Aalam and Halder's (2018) and Sokmen's (2013) research underscores the connection between tests, anxiety, and students' academic performance.

The studies reveal that high levels of anxiety can hinder students' achievements, while effective strategies and interventions can help mitigate the negative impact of anxiety on academic outcomes. Researchers like Rasool et al. (2023, p. 2) mentioned that linguistic difficulty is one of the essential elements that highly increases the adverse impact of anxiety on an individual's behavior. This notion is endorsed by academics who reported that "writing anxiety can be caused by various factors, including a lack of knowledge of the subject matter and spelling rules and a fear of not being appreciated. In the same manner, discussing the contributing factors of examination anxiety among medical students, Almutairi A. G. (2024) found that there is a direct correlation between anxiety and poor social support. In other words, poor social support is one of the elements that causes medical students to create examination anxiety. In the same manner, Sabti et al. (2019) examine the different elements that cause test anxiety among Iraqi EFL students. The purpose of

the study is to measure the impact of the three components of writing anxiety (somatic, avoidance behavior, and cognitive) on Iraqi EFL learners' attitudes and also to determine the component causing the highest anxiety rates. Besides, the study also aims to detect the key elements that provoke anxiety. The finding demonstrated that the participants are affected by all the three aforesaid components.

Therefore, acquiring a foreign language inevitably engenders a pervasive sense of tension and stress within the hearts and minds of students, manifesting as a formidable barrier to their academic progress. Regrettably, this overwhelming burden of stress and anxiety often compels numerous students to prematurely abandon their language studies, thereby unleashing a detrimental ripple effect that reverberates throughout their prospects. Indeed, it becomes apparent that anxiety and academic accomplishments share an inextricable link, serving as interconnected factors that wield significant influence over the educational trajectory of learners. This intricate web of challenges is particularly evident among students endowed with exceptional learning aptitude as they grapple with multifaceted obstacles stemming from the pernicious grip of stress and anxiety. The harrowing amalgamation of examination-induced anxiety and the ceaseless weight of academic pressure play an indispensable role in shaping students' overall learning achievements. The formidable strain experienced by students during the prelude to written tests or examinations engenders a myriad of psychological stressors and traumatic experiences, permeating their consciousness and significantly compromising their performance as well as impeding their pursuit of educational excellence.

The examination policy for secondary-level students in Nepal, as designed by the Office of the Controller of Examinations, emphasizes uniformity and standardization in conducting and evaluating examinations. It does not have any special provisions for those students who experience anxiety or stress during examinations, such as the English written examination. The policy is primarily concerned with administrative arrangements such as schedules, grading criteria, and release of results, but not with accommodations such as additional time, alternative assessment methods, or counseling for examinees with mental health conditions. The exclusion indicates the need for inclusive measures to address the diverse needs of examinees. For example, including such provisions would greatly help students who face examination-related stress, particularly in the case of English language examinations, which tend to be an extra burden for many.

Research Gap

Anxiety, stress, and academic achievement have been inextricably linked for some time now and remain under scrutiny in many educational circles. This has been coupled with the formulation of policies that address this seemingly inescapable examination-induced anxiety as one of the major detriments to student outcomes. However, notwithstanding these developments, a good gap remains in what is perceived about the nature and causes of test anxiety among secondary-level students in learning English. Against the backdrop of the literature mentioned in the earlier review, the present study attempts to explore this gap to establish anxiety perceptions that influence students' academic performances at the secondary level during written English tests. In this respect, the present research work is expected to contribute to the literature on the subject and provide some aspects that have not yet been covered. Although previous studies have also tackled the issue of test anxiety, which are only about co-relation studies and they study the relationship of various factors with academic achievements, hardly focused on the nature and causes of anxiety such upon students at the secondary level concerning the understanding of the students acquiring the English language; hence, this research goes into an investigation of perceived anxiety within this group perspective not especially given much attention heretofore.

Recognizing the significance of understanding the experiences and perceptions of students, this research adopts a qualitative approach, employing interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions to gather data. The study aims to unearth the nuanced aspects of anxiety and its impact on student's performance by harnessing the power of firsthand accounts and personal narratives. Through these means, a comprehensive picture of the perceived consequences of anxiety can be painted, allowing for a more robust understanding of the phenomenon. Drawing from Bandura's social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals learn from their observations of others and develop self-efficacy beliefs that influence their behavior, this study explores how secondary-level students perceive the impact of anxiety on their academic performance. By examining the interplay between cognitive factors, social influences, and emotional states, the research aims to uncover the intricate web of relationships that contribute to the manifestation and amplification of test anxiety.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is the overall idea or plan of the researcher to connect different components to make one. Jabareen (2009), as a network or a plane of connected ideas that, when taken collectively, offer a thorough comprehension of a phenomenon or phenomena. The ideas that make up a conceptual framework provide mutual support, articulate their associated phenomena, and build a philosophy unique to that framework. So, a general conceptual framework is a concept that helps us understand the phenomenon comprehensively. In the same manner, Tamene (2016) thought that "the term 'concept' does not stand alone but is connected to other concepts and kinds of meaning. A "framework" of connected or related concepts is thus created as a result of the mental relationship with other notions. So, a conceptual framework is the overall connections of different concepts that make a complete or whole design. Likewise, about the conceptual framework, the conceptual framework is an expression either narratively or graphically, of the study being embarked upon. It consists of the study variables: dependent, independent, and at times, intervening or control variables, and the presumed relationships among the variables (Miles et al., 2014). Thus, a conceptual framework is the wholeness of different ideas connected and understanding to interpret the research problems or interest in a phenomenon broadly. It expresses the whole study as a picture; however, it does not predict the result but understands the phenomena.

The present study explores the perceived effect of examination or test anxiety among secondary-level students during written examinations in English. The current research approach is underpinned by the tenets of a Descriptive paradigm, using a methodology known as narrative phenomenology. This research primarily seeks to identify insight from data that answers the specific research questions, which try to explore and understand the lived experience of secondary-level students concerning examination or test anxiety. Utilizing the descriptive paradigm means this study concedes that human experience is subjective and unique to the individual human perspective. It also realizes that meaning given by individuals for experiences comes from cultural, social, and personal contexts. The paradigm is appropriate for the chosen Descriptive phenomenology, whereby participants can tell their stories and give complex details pertinent to their experiences with examination or test anxiety. These research questions serve as guideposts in this investigation, enabling one to set bounds within the study and define the direction of data collection and analysis. These questions tease out how secondary-level students have subjective experiences related

to exploring the convoluted ways examination or test anxiety affects performance, emotions, and overall well-being during written English examinations. This study investigates the different examination or test anxiety dimensions by interacting with secondary-level students and collecting their narratives. The elements contributing to anxiety-expectation, self-perception, academic pressure, and influence of the educational environment further come up for discussion in the following context.

The Soft Positivist paradigm, employed in combination with a phenomenological research approach, is an appropriate means of researching secondary-level students' lived experiences. The paradigm embraces the richness of human experience and attempts to uncover the underlying student structures of perception and response to examination or test anxiety. With the embracement of a soft positivist stance, this research places empirical evidence in great esteem yet, at the same time, considers subjective reality on the part of individuals. This allows one to adequately grasp the complex character of examination anxiety using both quantifiable data and the words of students themselves. Of these strategies, phenomenology is considerably more appropriate for this particular research because it confronts the structure of experience and attempts to explain it from the experiencers' perspective.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter talks about anxiety as a psychological issue, having different indicators like feelings of stress, fear, difficulty breathing, and discomfort, and it can even lead to depression. It is expressed in various bodily and cognitive responses like worried thoughts, tension, sweating, rapid breathing, increased blood pressure, etc. It can be normal and stressful depending on the condition and the situation of the human being. According to Moreno (2022) and Tridevi and Gupta (2010), anxiety can be a normal reaction to a stressful situation that helps people get ready for the problem. However, when anxiety turns to extreme discomfort, it can have hazardous effects on mental and physical health.

The chapter also discussed and explored the concept of examination anxiety, a special type of anxiety that generally arises before and during the time of examination, mainly focused on any special subject. According to empirical researchers Amalu (2017) and Amalu and Bekomson (2020), test anxiety or examination anxiety frequently brings stress and pressure in academic situations like before and during the examination time, which can cause different physical and

psychological distress. This form of anxiety has been demonstrated to negatively impact students' academic performance by causing distractions, impairing concentration and memory, and provoking strong emotional responses like embarrassment and anger, as noted by Marefat (2014), Innami (2006), and Oliver (2016). Moreover, the chapter sheds light on the impact of anxiety on different aspects of academic performance across various age groups and educational levels. Studies by Birjande and Alemi (2010) and Macdonald (2001) found a correlation between anxiety and reduced academic performance due to impaired cognitive functions like concentration and memory. Research by Aalam and Halder (2018) and Sokmen (2013) further emphasized that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower academic achievement and that inadequate preparation and practice can exacerbate anxiety. Not only these previous studies, but the chapter also discussed the recent studies of Viloría Hernández et al. (2020) and Sabti et al. (2019) about the cause of test anxiety among the different levels of students.

Despite significant research on test anxiety, the chapter identified a gap in understanding the nature and causes of anxiety in English written examinations among secondary-level students in English language learning contexts. It suggests that future studies should focus on these students' perceptions and experiences to develop effective strategies for managing anxiety in academic settings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is structured around philosophical considerations, including ontology, epistemology, and axiology, in conjunction with research paradigm and design. Firstly, my ontology delves into exploring concepts and ideas and their interconnectedness. This aspect of the methodology concerns understanding the nature of reality and the fundamental building blocks of knowledge relevant to the study. By exploring ontology, I aim to grasp the underlying essence of the subject matter being investigated. Secondly, the epistemology employed in my research methodology deals with the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, validated, and applied. This aspect focuses on understanding the sources of knowledge relevant to the study and the methods used to ascertain its validity. By employing a robust framework, I strive to ensure that the knowledge generated through my research is reliable and trustworthy. Thirdly, axiology plays a significant role in shaping my methodology. Axiology refers to the study of values and ethics, and in the context of my research, it pertains to the inherent value carried by the study itself. By considering axiology, I aim to determine the significance and implications of my research and any ethical considerations that may arise throughout the process.

Research Design

Descriptive phenomenology has been utilized in designing this study because it presupposes that the concept of reality is based on one's experiences and that there can, thus, be as many realities as the number of individuals. It also helps one delve deep into participants' experiences, specifically for the "what" and "how" questions regarding an experience. This approach allows for rich, detailed descriptions of phenomena as the respondents experience them and, therefore, a comprehensive understanding of their reality.

In this study, Soft positivism, as a research paradigm, presents an appealing model of comprehension of examination anxiety in terms of introducing subjective human emotions into structured systems. Hart's (1994) seminal work, *The Concept of Law*, is a foundational text supporting soft positivism, as it emphasizes moral and intrinsic dimensions within legal systems. It coincides with what is achieved through

literature about test anxiety, whereby intrinsic traits like self-doubt and fear of failure come into contact with extrinsic education infrastructure like standard tests. Similarly, Diener (2006), “A defense of soft positivism: justice and principle processes,” investigates how soft positivism determines the ground between hard systems and personal opinion, finding out how internal conflict can inform action within bounded scopes. By employing soft positivism, this research acknowledges the interactivity of systematized communities of scholars and the very specific contributory factors constructing examination anxiety to make the phenomenon comprehensible deeply and extensively.

Research Approach

The research adopted a qualitative approach, which entails a descriptive phenomenology of social phenomena, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject within its authentic setting. This study seeks to capture and narrate students' experiences in natural situations, shedding light on the intricate dynamics at play. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is characterized by its multimethod focus and interpretative, naturalistic approach, wherein researchers examine phenomena in their genuine environments and endeavor to unravel their meaning through the perspective's individuals bring to them. Qualitative research goes beyond the superficial examination of surface-level data; it delves into the heart of social phenomena, seeking to comprehend the underlying complexities and subtleties that often elude quantitative approaches. By immersing themselves in the natural settings where these phenomena occur, qualitative researchers can gather rich, contextualized data that offers a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Flick (1998) emphasizes the practical orientation of qualitative research in terms of the topics it covers and the techniques it employs. This research approach holds a prominent position within social science due to its ability to address the multifaceted aspects of human lives and the social contexts in which phenomena unfold. By utilizing qualitative methods and procedures, researchers can explore the intricate tapestry of social interactions, meanings, and experiences, illuminating the intricacies that quantitative research often fails to capture.

Qualitative research methods encompass a variety of data collection techniques, such as interviews. Through interviews, researchers can engage in meaningful conversations with students, allowing them to share their perspectives, experiences, and emotions in their own words. This direct interaction enables a

comprehensive exploration of the participants' unique stories and insights, providing a nuanced portrayal of their experiences.

In addition to interviews, observations play a crucial role in qualitative research. By immersing in the natural settings where students engage in various activities, researchers can witness firsthand the behaviors, interactions, and environmental factors that shape their experiences. These observations offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, capturing the nuances that may be overlooked in other research approaches. Furthermore, qualitative research often involves document analysis, where researchers examine documents, texts, and artifacts relevant to the research topic. These documents can include academic papers, personal diaries, social media posts, or any other form of written or visual material that provides insight into the experiences of the students. By analyzing such documents, researchers can uncover hidden meanings, explore social discourses, and identify patterns contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

By adopting a qualitative research approach, this study aims to uncover the students' experiences within their natural environments. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research seeks to capture the multifaceted aspects of their lives, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. Utilizing qualitative research methods and procedures provides a powerful lens through which the social context and dynamics surrounding the phenomenon can be examined, ensuring a rich and nuanced understanding of the subject matter. In doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge within the social science field, highlighting the significance of qualitative research in unraveling the complexities of human experiences.

Process of Generating Meaning

Generating meaning from the collected data is a crucial step of qualitative research, especially since we should be very careful while interpreting the stories and extracting the theme. It entails careful interpretation of participants' stories and extracting themes from them. In this section, I analyzed data obtained through interviews. According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), qualitative data analysis is one of the basic activities of the research process as it enables researchers to systematically search for meaning via the transformation of raw data into patterns, themes, and categories. It is a required process for interpreting the embedded

meanings within qualitative data and establishing the rigor and quality of the analysis. I listened to participants' stories by developing deep rapport and listening. It, therefore, allowed me to interpret their stories in context and relate them to the literature. Through such a process, I developed themes from the narratives of participants. Care was taken to transcribe the data accurately to ensure depth in analysis.

Thus, it provided a detailed understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants on the research issue when data analysis from this approach was considered. This is an essential step in qualitative research since raw data can be turned into insightful data that can lead to practice and policy improvements.

Selection of participants

Specifically, for this study, I have used a customized version of the Examination Anxiety Scale from Cassady (2004) into the English version, which I used to choose the participants. First, I gave the questions to find out the participants; the questions were given to 200 students. In this process, participants indicated how statements concerning examination anxiety mirror their experiences on this modified version of the Likert scale, which has four response options ranging from "1 = Not at all typical of me" to "4 = Very typical of me." The English Examination Anxiety Scale efficiently evaluates factors like fear, emotionality, and cognitive hindrance, which are exclusive to English written examinations, by including these answer possibilities. An in-depth assessment of the effects of test anxiety on performance was made possible by the careful selection of six participants out of two hundred students, who suitably span a range of anxiety levels. Then, I went to talk to the parents of my selected participants, and I gave them the pseudo names Raj, Sagar, Ankita, Bebisha, Pooja, and Dinesh. Firstly, they hesitated to talk, but after clarifying my purpose and my promise not to use their real identity, they agreed.

Philosophical Considerations

Philosophical concerns are an essential component of knowledge formation and evolution, and they play a complex role in the broader quest for understanding. While many other variables contribute to knowledge advancement, philosophical reasoning stands out as being an essential one. According to Saunders (2009), research philosophy is an all-encompassing framework of ideas and presumptions that influence the process of knowledge creation. Thinking philosophically when conducting research not only makes information easier to get but also promotes the

methodical development of knowledge within a particular topic. People have a greater grasp of the topic matter and the variables influencing its advancement by exploring the underlying concepts, assumptions, and paradigms that support research.

Philosophical exploration serves as a guiding compass, allowing researchers to navigate through the complexities of their chosen field and formulate meaningful assumptions that lay the groundwork for further investigation. Moreover, philosophical considerations enable researchers to reflect upon the nature of knowledge critically. Questions about the origin, nature, and scope of knowledge arise, leading to a more profound exploration of epistemological principles. By contemplating these philosophical inquiries, researchers gain insights into knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and validation dynamics.

Philosophical considerations also extend to examining data and sources within the research process. Researchers critically evaluate different sources' credibility, reliability, and biases, ensuring the knowledge's robustness. Additionally, philosophical perspectives help researchers navigate the ethical dimensions of their work, ensuring the responsible and principled pursuit of knowledge. Throughout the research journey, philosophical considerations act as a guiding force, shaping the direction and methodology of investigations. They provide a framework for critical thinking, enabling researchers to scrutinize their assumptions, methods, and interpretations. By constantly questioning and refining their philosophical stance, researchers contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of knowledge.

In conclusion, philosophical considerations play a pivotal role in the construction and development of knowledge. They provide researchers with a systematic approach to formulating assumptions, navigating complex fields of study, reflecting on the nature of knowledge, evaluating data and sources, and upholding ethical standards. By embracing philosophical perspectives, researchers contribute to the continuous growth and refinement of knowledge, ultimately advancing our understanding of the world.

Ontology

The study's concepts and categories are referred to as its ontology. In this study, ontology refers to the body of ideas prevalent in academic circles. Because learning is a cognitive activity, there is always a correlation between learning and emotion. According to Ding & Foo (2002), the Semantic Web represents the next stage of Web transformation, and "ontology has a critical role in allowing content-

based access, interoperability, communications, and providing qualitatively new levels of services. Similarly, Smith (2003) stated that the science of what is, of the sorts and structures of things, qualities, events, processes, and relations in every region of reality," is what ontology, a subfield of philosophy, is said to be. By supporting this view, Schwandt (2019) compares ontological debates to "a locked door in research methods classrooms—everyone knows it's there, but few are given the key" (p. 72). As a result, this research's field of focus was how was the nature of anxiety among secondary-level students and what are the factors that were responsible for causing them anxiety along with their impact on their academic performance.

Epistemology

The theory of knowledge in this area of research is called epistemology. When seeking the truth about individuals in natural environments, Audi (2010) defined epistemology as the study of how what we see and know works with the evidence that supports our ideas. Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996) supported this position by stating that epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with what constitutes knowledge, where it is located, and how it grows. Similarly, this study's epistemology is the belief that reality differs from each perspective. So, I use transcendental /descriptive phenomenology to explore and discuss the connection between success and anxiety.

Axiology

Axiology is the study of value, so in this research, axiology refers to the significance of the research after its completion. According to Viega (2016), axiology is essential to research because it explores how ethical and aesthetic principles may influence the decisions made when conducting research. Similarly, Tomar (2014) mentioned that axiology is concerned with what ought to be. It addresses the nature of values and concerns character development and moral values education. The research discussed how anxiety manifested among my participants along with the causing elements. So, axiology in research stands for the value carried out with the study, and this research will be significant for the students, teachers, and parents who are directly and indirectly related to the problem of test anxiety.

Soft Positivism as a Research Paradigm

A research Paradigm is a theoretical framework on which the research is based. I have chosen Soft positivism for this research. Among the various research paradigms, soft positivism stands out as a balanced approach that integrates both

empirical inquiry and interpretative understanding. This paradigm recognizes that while an objective reality exists, our comprehension of it is shaped by subjective experiences and contextual influences (Ryan, 2018). Unlike strict positivism, which relies on measurable and observable phenomena, soft positivism acknowledges the limitations of absolute objectivity and embraces a more flexible approach to understanding human behavior. This study adopts soft positivism as its guiding framework to explore the phenomenon of exam anxiety, allowing for an in-depth analysis of students' lived experiences while maintaining a structured empirical approach.

In the same manner, the Descriptive approach of phenomenology is a strategy that attempts to 'get into the mind of the subjects being studied,' so to speak, and to comprehend and describe what the subject is thinking or experiencing about the situation, according to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). By supporting this view, Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) claimed that rebuilding the text's intended meaning is necessary. Researchers might investigate, explain, express, and position themselves in the participant's vision or thinking pattern using the Descriptive approach of phenomenology to find in-depth life experiences through data analysis. In the same manner, according to Creswell (2007), In contrast to aiming to generalize the basis of understanding for the entire population, researchers are more likely to investigate a deeper understanding of the phenomena and their complexity in their context. Hence, descriptive phenomenology is used to study and understand the character of participants' lived experiences by describing phenomena as they appear, free from interpretation and bias. The descriptive phenomenological research approach helps the researcher to understand the data and interact diversely. Soft positivism is the main paradigm that helps in understanding data gist.

Quality Standards

Research should adhere to rigorous reliability and objectivity standards while avoiding conflicting interests. Researchers need to be mindful of trustworthy study findings. As noted by Loh (2015), inquiries into the standards of qualitative research often give rise to discussions on quality, validity, reliability, and generalizability issues. These debates can become convoluted and unproductive due to the diverse epistemological and ontological perspectives that underpin each research project. Similarly, Akkerman et al. (2006) argue that visibility, comprehensibility, and acceptability are three overarching characteristics that should be employed to assess

the quality of scientific research decisions, mainly when the analysis process necessitates multiple interpretations and iterations within ontological frameworks.

Consequently, adhering to quality standards in research endeavors is imperative to ensure the study's authenticity, validity, and reliability. To enhance the quality of my research, I will adhere to the following standards, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research ensures credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Various approaches can make a researcher develop trust in these strategies, such as prolonged engagement, observation, and member checking. Prolonged engagement provides opportunities to build relationships and develop an extensive understanding of the context in which subtle nuances emerge. Through persistent observation, accurate and thorough data are garnered since there would be a focus on the ongoing concern about salient aspects of study features. Member checking allows participants to confirm findings to enhance credibility by comparing interpretations with their experiences and views. These approaches make research rigorous, relatable, and understandable, enhancing practical significance and broader acceptance. When research is relatable and legitimate, it has a greater potential for real-world impact and application, thus being of value to the public, practitioners, and policymakers alike (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

Credibility is the other quality standard I followed in conducting this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve credibility, I allowed the participants to express themselves regarding their problems with anxiety and fear of examinations. To make them explain it truthfully, I met with them several times, created a good rapport with them, and made the environment friendly enough for them to express themselves without any inhibitions. This helped me to retrieve genuine narratives from them. Using these, the research meets rigorous methodological standards and provides authentic insights into participants' experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

Another important quality standard I followed is transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) add. The establishment of transferability was mainly based on dense description and narration, which had a well-developed context and study process. In other words, detailed research settings, participants, and procedures were adopted to

give enough material to any future researcher to decide upon the applicability of the findings in another setting. This heavy documentation involves the whole research process, from data collection to interpretation, thereby providing more transparency in the study, hence its replication. Moreover, the narratives collected were elaborate and detailed and thus captured the intricacies and complexities of participants' experiences. These strategies not only strengthen the present study's rigor but also provide researchers in the future the chance to apply the lessons learned to their work, increasing the findings' acceptability and application. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), transferability allows me to contribute substantially to the greater corpus of knowledge.

Confirmability

Confirmability is another quality standard in my research, ensuring that the results are the product of a scientific and systematic process, not just the researchers' imagination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish confirmability, I recorded each interview with participants, coded them, and wrote reflections after each interview. This process ensures that the findings and interpretations are grounded in the data collected, enhancing the study's objectivity and reliability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Reflexivity

According to Saldana (2015), Reflection is "the act of considering numerous research project components to obtain personal insight of their meanings, to make sense of what may be perplexing or unclear, and to appreciate the purpose or significance of something (p. 198)". As an English teacher at the secondary level, I have seen many students show very good performance in English classrooms but can achieve the expected outcomes. To establish reflexivity as a quality standard in my research, I listened and deeply analyzed the students' narratives about their stress and feelings before and during the English test.

Authenticity

Another quality standard that I applied in my research is authenticity. The perspectives and narration of the participants will be narrated without violating the main essence of their experiences and perceptions. So, it will be conducted genuinely and credibly by making the participants aware of my research and its issues.

Ethical Considerations

A researcher must always pass through many ethical considerations in the research process. According to Heleski (1964, as cited in Li et al., 2008), "narrative

studies should be designed most safely, and a formal consent form should ideally be filled out by informants in research who have been recruited willingly and informed of the research study. Participants' consent from the informants must be given voluntarily. Ethical issues are faced by any researcher while conducting the research process, such as collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data. Here, I will listen to the real experiences of secondary-level students in their natural setting. I will address the ethical issues in the following way.

Confidentiality

I should know that anxiety and stress are psychological issues that a person cannot talk about openly. So, I will gain the trust of my participants, making them believe in their confidentiality. I will ensure that their identity, information, and responses will be confidential and will not disclose them to anyone until they permit it.

Honesty

Another ethical consideration followed in carrying out this research was honesty. The information was collected honestly, and the participants will not be asked questions about the subject matter of this research. Participants will be free to leave the process if they want to withdraw.

Anonymity

To maintain this ethical consideration, the participants provided pseudo-names, and their real identities will be removed from the study. I will ensure that the participants' information may not affect their privacy and career.

Other ethical considerations I am going to follow throughout this study are as follows:

- i. While conducting research, I followed all the guidelines of the university and the review board.
- ii. I got pre-permission from the school authority, parents (if minor participants and the participant).
- iii. I made very little disturbance to the site and respected the differences.
- iv. I will preserve the participants' dignity and self-respect.

Thus, I will do my best to follow all the precautions for creating no harm to any individual or group through my actions.

Chapter Summary

The chapter begins with a discussion of the research approach, where the research philosophy, research design, and research approach employed in the research are presented. The methodology incorporates major aspects of research philosophy, i.e., ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontologically, the study examines the nature of reality, the phenomenon of anxiety among students and its effects on their academic performance. It aims to understand the nature of anxiety, valuing the fact that every individual lives and experiences reality uniquely. Epistemologically, the study investigates the formulation and testing of knowledge, acknowledging that every participant's experience of anxiety will be shaped by their viewpoint and context. The epistemological paradigm warrants the use of transcendental and descriptive phenomenology in examining students' lived experiences since it enables a more perceptive understanding of the topic. Axiologically, the study places more value on the ethical significance of the research and its usefulness to various stakeholders such as students, teachers, and parents. By taking ethical standards and moral values into consideration, the research ensures that the findings are beneficial to the people who are directly and indirectly impacted by exam anxiety. The research design of descriptive phenomenology is chosen, which supports the in-depth exploration of the participants' experience and enables the establishment of the essence of the participants' anxiety. The research paradigm adhered to is that of soft positivism, a middle road that unites empirical data collection with a focus on the interpretation of subjective human experiences. Soft positivism recognizes the value of understanding individual perceptions within a broader, more objective framework and supports the investigation of meanings and interpretations that different people give to their experiences. The chapter also outlines the qualitative research design employed in the research, where there is a focus on an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of examination anxiety. Interviewing, observation, and document analysis are the primary data collection instruments, with the researcher seeking to collect rich, context-dependent data from the students. Participants for the research were selected using a modified Examination Anxiety Scale that had been administered to 200 students. Based on their responses, six of the participants were chosen to represent a range of anxiety levels. The participants were approached openly about the aims of the study and the assurance of anonymity, which helped in

establishing trust and addressing ethical issues. Data analysis is the careful interpretation of the participants' stories, and the researcher identifies meaningful patterns and themes that form a new level of insight regarding the students' experiences. Quality in the research is guaranteed by standards such as credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is upheld by strategies such as member checking, where participants read and sanction their stories, and peer debriefing, where other researchers provide feedback for analysis. Reliability is ensured by documenting the entire research process so that others can follow the steps and replicate the study if necessary. Confirmability, or objectivity, is ensured by minimizing bias and ensuring conclusions are reached from the data, not personal assumptions. The study's philosophical concerns guide the researcher in maintaining ethical integrity throughout the process, while quality criteria ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. In adhering to these methodological and quality standards, the research aims to have a comprehensive understanding of the etiology of exam anxiety, its impact on students' academic performance, and the overall implications for teachers and parents. With a guarded, ethical, and rigorous research process, the research contributes meaningfully to the complex relationship between anxiety and academic achievement.

CHAPTER IV

UNMASKING THE ANATOMY OF EXAMINATION ANXIETY: INSIGHTS FROM SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS

Examination anxiety is a crucial phenomenon affecting students worldwide. This study explored the nature of anxiety experienced by secondary-level students during their written English exams. Understanding secondary-level students' real experiences with their pre- and post-written English exams is the main goal of this part. The study examined the complex feelings and ideas that students experienced in these desperate situations using the lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis. The data gathered from in-depth interviews fully showed students' complicated subjective reality of their exam anxiety. Examining the stories, the discussion aims to reveal the latent reasons behind exam anxiety. The study used Descriptive phenomenological analysis as a lens through which to examine the complex thoughts and sensations that students encountered in these high-stakes scenarios. The data acquired from in-depth interviews thoroughly illustrated the complex subjective reality of exam anxiety experienced by students.

Using secondary school students as my subjects, I investigated the complex terrain of written test anxiety in English. I discovered several major themes that shed light on the physiological and psychological aspects of the phenomenon through in-depth interviews with six individuals. On my journey to determine the relationship between students' academic achievement and anxiety, these themes act as an important aspect to find out the real situation of the students of secondary level.

Multifaced Nature of Anxiety among the Students

Anxiety and stress can take many forms in various individuals. They have distinct natures depending on the person and how they influence or react to them. Different elements, including heredity, personal experiences, and emotional responses of the individual, shape the explanations or core causes of this stress. Students of any age or ability experience a particular type of stress called examination anxiety. It symbolizes the complex character of any situation since it can be set off by any demand to do well or reach a high standard of success. According to Sullivan (2002), anxiety impedes memory and focus, which ultimately leads to subpar performance. In

the same manner, the ways students react to anxiety are also different according to the individual. After discussing with six participants, they revealed the nature of anxiety through their physical, mental, and cognitive hurdles. Not all the participants had a similar type of nature of anxiety. Some of them had more physical symptoms, and some of them suffered from psychological distress. Among them, some pose with both cognitive disorders.

Physiological Symptoms of Anxiety among Students in English-Written Examination

The participants revealed their physiological symptoms before and during the day of their written examination of English. The physiological symptoms vary according to the students. Some common physical symptoms that the students felt were increasing in heart rate, excessive sweating on hands and body, trembling and shaking the body, feeling of urine continuously, nausea and stomach ache without any previous syndrome, dry mouth or feeling of thirst regularly throughout the examination, headaches, and sleep disturbances. The six participants were Ankita, Raj, Pooja, Bebisha, Sagar, and Dinesh. Anika told me what happened exactly that day. She said,

Everything was fine for two days. This time, I was very hopeful about scoring good marks because I had prepared well. ” (pause and she was looking towards her toe for a minute) But suddenly, I felt nervous, and my heartbeat so fast that it felt as if I was running speedily for an hour. (pauses and tries to smile but is not able to. Looking towards Mother, who was working a little far away) That day, after getting the question paper, my hands started shaking, and my palms were sweaty. Even though I knew some answers, I couldn’t write.

Her symptoms, such as a racing heartbeat and perspiration, were the cause of her poor exam performance. Stress and anxiety are commonplace among students when taking tests, and this can have a detrimental effect on their cognitive functions, including working memory and reasoning. Similarly, Raj disclosed his physical unwellness before the examination day. He said,

That day, I was thinking about my English examination. Generally, among other subjects, I got lower marks in English, though I had prepared very hard for it. That day, suddenly, my stomach started aching, and my mother told me that it was due to gas and gave me medicine for gas. The medicine didn’t

work, and I had a fever after some time. (rubbing hands with each other and suddenly feeling nervous) Every time before the English exam, I feel sick, sometimes with a fever, headache, and diarrhea, and become ok after finishing the exam. However, I cannot attempt all the questions due to my sickness.

Likewise, discussing physical distress, Sagar also stated some uneasiness during the examination. He said that

during the examination, my heart was beating so loudly. When I saw my question paper, I saw those questions for the first time. I even felt that that language was not English, something I had never been familiar with. But every time, different things happen to me. (suddenly feeling nervous, long pause, and one glass of water was given) you know, (trying to laugh but can't). Last time, I needed to go to the toilet frequently, and I almost did pee on my pants. So I couldn't give my full exam. Due to that, I often get NGs in English.

Ankita, Raj, and Sagar encounter physical unwellness before the written examination of English, which happens almost before and during their written examination. Ankita narrated that despite being prepared, she could not answer all the questions in the examination, and Raj revealed his recurring sickness, especially during the English examination. Sagar's condition is even more miserable among the three. He every time gets NG in English. These narratives of Ankita and Raj highlight the profound impact of anxiety perceived by these two students on their academic achievements.

Discussing the nature of anxiety as physical symptoms, most of them have faced common types of physical symptoms of anxiety. Talking about three, Raj and Ankita's nature of anxiety is moderate, whereas Sagar faced severe stress, which made him physically unwell and even almost lost control of himself.

Psychological Symptoms of Anxiety

After discussing the nature of anxiety, my participants explored the perceived impact in terms of psychological syndromes of examination anxiety. They revealed different psychological syndromes, forgetting everything after getting the paper, mental blocks, even knowing the answer automatically after submitting the answer sheet, rapid racing thoughts, feelings of nervousness, anger without any issue, feelings of inadequacy after preparing a lot, low self-esteem, etc. among the six participants pooja stated that,

In the examination hall, I continuously bite my pen's cover. (laughing). My inner heart was shouting, Pooja, this time also, you will get very low marks. I'm thinking more and writing less. (looking around) I felt that everyone in the examination hall was looking at me without writing, and they knew I had forgotten all the answers, whether in writing an essay or grammar, which I had practiced many times in class or at home.

In the same manner, Bebishia also felt some psychological stress, as she stated, *Every time, I focused on preparing well for the English examination because, due to this subject, I always got fewer grades than I expected. (as if remembering something) You know what happened last time...(pause) When I saw my question paper, I felt it was blank. I also asked the teacher, but everybody laughed at me. My teacher told me to go outside, drink water, and come, and I did exactly. After some time, I saw the questions there, but I was already nervous and couldn't write properly, so I quit the exam in one hour (rubbing our toes with each other). I don't know what happens to me during examination time, especially in English. My mother said I am afraid a lot. That's why it happens.*

The nature of anxiety and its symptoms varied according to the participant. However, the ultimate thing is that the varied psychological problems that occurred before and during the examination became an issue in performing poorly in the written examination of English. These symptoms include forgetting all the prepared answers, having mental blocks like the language is new to them, having fast and racing thoughts, and feeling less prepared after giving too much time. These two participants show these symptoms among six. There is another whose statement scared me. Dinesh stated that,

Everything was ok till yesterday evening. The next day, I had my English exam, and I knew that I was afraid of that subject; my mother also told me to read well. Nothing happened till the morning also. I concentrated on my English exam, but after entering the exam hall (paused for a little while. Looking up at the sky for a while), I suddenly felt sweaty, and my hand started trembling. I got outraged because every question I prepared seemed unfamiliar, and I forgot the answer. (try to be clearer) Even though I had known these answers earlier, I had forgotten everything. I came out after one hour and went home, and I was so angry and depressed. I didn't want to talk

to anyone. I cried a lot, and I was thinking of killing myself because I couldn't do my examination according to the expectations of my parents and teachers. At that time, my mother suggested many things, like the previous exam, and I hoped to do better but couldn't. So, I cried all day and couldn't sleep at night.

The statement of Dinesh touched me. While discussing their psychological trauma or behavior, the participants felt during the time of examination that these syndromes severely impacted their achievements in the written examination of English. Pooja mentioned her struggle with nervousness and biting the pen during the examination and criticized herself for not doing well. Similarly, she felt paralyzed, thinking more and writing less, and imagined everyone in the hall watching her struggle. Bebisha talked of a painful moment when her exam sheet went blank, making her feel alone and funny to her classmates. She left the test early because she was so worried, even though she obeyed her teacher's recommendation to take a break. Another layer to Dinesh's account was that he was right until he entered the exam room; at that point, he started to sweat and quiver. As well-known questions appeared unfamiliar to him, his annoyance and aggravation increased. He eventually left the exam early, overcome with despair and thoughts of suicide. These first-hand experiences show the significant effects of test anxiety, demonstrating how it may cause extreme emotional discomfort and impair academic performance.

Cognitive Hurdles during Exam

After discussing the physical and psychological symptoms the participant felt during and before the time of examination, it is clear that due to these traumas, they have different cognitive hurdles that lead further to poor performance. According to Westhoff et al. (2024), cognitive hurdle or inflexibility, characterized by an excessive attachment to cognitions and avoidance of distressing experiences or over-attachment to supposedly positive ones, can be detrimental. The students suffered different types of physical and mental distress, which caused them difficulty in concentration, racing thoughts, memory lapses, etc. They also suffer from poor time management, increasing stress levels, and forgetting the prepared answers when time runs out. Different participants stated different things about the cognitive hurdle. These hurdles can be discussed by categorizing the following points:

Mind Blockage under Pressure

Participants revealed different cognitive hurdles during the written examination of English subjects. Their story is different; however, the conclusion is

that they end up with the same poor performance and low achievements. Among the participants, one of the participants, Dinesh, stated his cognitive hurdle as,

Though I had been preparing the whole day until midnight, I couldn't sleep after that. Even while sleeping, I tried memorizing difficult answers, especially in essays and grammatical structures. But I also forget the known answers when the exam time comes nearer.

Dinesh felt a mind blockage, leading him to forget even the prepared answer. He constantly tried to memorize the answers to the probable difficult questions, but he could not write well in the exam. Another participant, Ankita, also had a similar experience. She felt as if questions were not in the paper or she had seen those questions for the first time. She said, *"I don't understand why I felt the questions were unfamiliar. Suddenly, I felt my questions were dancing, and I misunderstood the words."* Ankita also felt a similar type of mind blockage; it was as if she found the questions new, and the pressure made her feel that the questions were dancing.

Misinterpreting the Instruction Given

Another hurdle my participants felt during the examination was misinterpreting the instructions of the questions even though they discussed several of them with their subject teacher in the classroom and prepared some examples, too, as homework. Among the participants, Raj talked about this, and he said,

Many times, I did the same. I found I was misreading the question. (laugh) In the last exam, I did true /false in rearranging, and the question was about conversation, and I wrote (pause, laugh by rubbing both of my hands and after holding my one hand) Please don't laugh, ok? (I nod my head) I wrote a message of condolence instead of writing a conversation. My subject teacher always scolded me about this, and I also read the question, but I don't know how it happened.

I laughed inside and was shocked by listening to the nature of the anxiety my participants were experiencing. Another participant, Ankita, said it had happened to her many times. Surprisingly, she found she had misread and written something else after leaving the examination hall.

Overanalyzing any of the Questions

My participants explored another cognitive hurdle they had been facing during the written examination of English: they were stuck on one difficult question and couldn't come out of it. About this hurdle, one of the participants, Ankita, stated,

My teacher and parents told me several times that if I didn't know any question, I should leave that and do the next; however, when I was searching for any answer like similar and opposite meaning from the passage and true or false from the passage or fill in the blanks, match the following, it took many times for me. If I didn't know the answer, I forgot the answers I knew previously to other's questions. I also tried to think and skipped the question, but my mind went blank when I got stuck and thought about the answer I didn't know.

From her expression, we can find that Ankita overanalyzed the question and took the pressure off that question, which finally led her not to attempt other questions because, due to that pressure, she could not accomplish her task, which impacted her achievements. In the same manner, the overanalyzing of the question, Sagar also expressed similar types of hurdles as,

While doing the answers, if I found any of the questions that I didn't know(laugh) well, many of them. But the first question that I didn't know and began to think about was that I couldn't go to the next question. If I knew the next answer after thinking about one unknown question, it took me a long time, and fear arose.

Ankita and Sagar faced similar hurdles during the examination, resulting in poor performance. Their expression proved that their overthinking caused them to be stuck on one question, and they could not perform well or attempt other questions.

Negative Thoughts Pattern

Exploring the different cognitive hurdles, the students and my participants discussed the rapid pressure through negative thoughts. They define their negative thought as their low confidence in attempting the English written exam due to various panic, physical and psychological discomfort, and stress. Among the six participants, Dinesh was more affected by these negative thoughts. He stated that,

I felt everyone else was writing except for me in the examination hall. I felt the questions were unfamiliar, and I didn't know any answers. I felt like every time this time, I was also unable to write the answer, and I was thinking about how my friends would laugh at me after the result and how my subject teacher would again tell me to do well next time. So many things ran through my mind(pause). It was like only I didn't know anything, and everybody knew that I couldn't write the answer.

Like Bebisha, other participants also stated a similar view and experience regarding negative thought patterns. They have low esteem and self-confidence, and they feel everyone else is watching them in the examination hall, and they know that means other students know that they don't know the answer. Talking about negative thoughts, Bebisa said,

I frequently bite my pen and nails during English examinations. My heart beats louder and louder after getting the question paper. I felt all the other students staring at me, and they knew I didn't know the answer. Gradually, I saw everything blurry and felt afraid.

Stress and anxiety among the students are presented in various forms and impact them differently based on the individual nature of personal experiences, genetics, and the environment around them. Talking about the nature of anxiety among my six participants, I also had different natures of anxiety, which are classified into physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, and cognitive hurdles. My participants exhibited different natures of anxiety.

While discussing the physical reactions to the examination anxiety, my participant faced some common issues, like Ankita's racing heartbeat and sweating palms, which hindered her ability to write good answers despite the preparation. Raj frequently got sick with stomachache and fever, which went with completing the English written examination. His illness occurred before the English examination, and it affected his performance. Sager has different physical symptoms than others. He reported a loud heartbeat and a feeling of unfamiliarity with the question, leading him to frequent trips to the toilet and affecting his achievements. These physical manifestations of anxiety and stress eventually lead all the students toward lower academic achievement in the written examination of English.

Talking about the psychological issues they experienced with the participants, where they reveal their various psychological symptoms. Because she thought that everyone else in the test room was observing her struggle with the question paper, Pooja talked about feeling anxious and critical of herself. Bebisha, who was too anxious to finish the exam on time, characterized her experience as a mental block that prevented her from seeing the questions on paper. Another participant, Dinesh, whose anxiety level is extreme, causes depression and very negative thoughts of doing suicide on him. These thoughts arise from his weakness in meeting his expectations of getting good marks after preparing a lot. These psychological

problems impact the students' overall achievements in the written examination of English with different natures. Not only that, but cognitive hurdles like mind blockage, negative thoughts, and sticking to one question rather than moving forward also profoundly impact student achievements.

So, anxiety among these participants is exhibited by the multifaced nature of physical, mental, and cognitive hurdles, which resulted in the poor achievements of these six students in the written examination of English.

A Look at What Makes Students Worried About English Exams

After talking about the types of anxiety that my participants had, I looked into the reasons why they experienced anxiety. Because science and technology are developing quickly, the globe is getting smaller today. Proficiency in English is deemed essential for pupils to gain knowledge of this global community. English language proficiency is essential for all students in the classroom and the workplace. Secondary school pupils are constantly pressured to do well on tests. Many students occasionally experience anxiety and tension as a result of the pressure to do well on written English exams. Not only the pressure of good achievement but some factors can become the source of anxiety for my participants in the written examination of English at the secondary level. These factors are categorized into two groups: external and internal factors.

What Extrinsic Factors Cause Anxiety for English Written Exams?

After taking insights from my participants, I came to know that examination anxiety, especially in subjects like English, can be influenced by many external factors like expectations of parents, society, peer pressure, examination environment, lack of preparation, societal influence, etc. These factors deeply influenced my participants beyond their intrinsic factors. These factors are the cause of anxiety for my participants.

Social Comparison and the Ambition of Competition

Most people or parents evaluate their students' achievement through the scoresheet they have, and the evaluation of English proficiency is no different than this. When the students are compared with their friends or others regarding their achievement, they feel a sudden burden or pressure to reach or fulfill the expectations. While discussing the cause of anxiety among my participants, most of them told me about this type of burden before and during the time of examination. The constant comparison can lead to the fear of not getting the expected result and being perceived

as unintelligent or talented due to low marks in English. About this cause, one of my participants, Raj, said,

I have always excelled in Maths, Science, Nepali, and social studies. Whenever my results came, I got good marks in all subjects except English, and generally, my parents said my brother was very good in English and all subjects. They took English as a very easy subject, and I could not score as well as my brother. I listened to the same thing every time. Even my dad called my relative and explained the same thing. I am not as good at studying as my brother because I always get lower grades in English.

Raj is generally compared with his brother, and despite getting good grades in other subjects, he is pressured by his parents to achieve better marks in English. In the same manner, other participants also narrated similar types of experiences. Another participant, Ankita, said,

Every time I am in class, my English teacher tells me to do better this time. She even suggested many ideas, which helped me get good marks. (pause.....laugh slowly) But I don't understand why I got low great. She gave me an example of my friend getting the same idea and scoring good marks, except for me. I tried to win my friends by scoring higher marks than them so my English teacher believed me and I could prove myself better among my friends.

Ankita's statement made clear that the pressure of being better than others and winning the competition is one of the reasons for her anxiety. About the competitive environment and the pressure of another participant, Bebisha said,

Our school is famous for its academic excellence, and there is a lot of competition among my friends. Our English teacher provided different skims or prizes to those who did their examination according to her expectations. If somebody does very well in English, he remains an example for everyone throughout the year, and he /she gets several opportunities in class. (laughs and pauses....rubbing both hands constantly) While this is meant to motivate us, it makes me more anxious. I feel like I'm always being compared to the top performers. During English exams, I can't help but think about how my classmates are doing. The thought of not measuring up to them makes me incredibly nervous. I start doubting myself and my abilities, and it's hard to

concentrate on the exam when all I can think about is how I might be failing compared to others.

The comparative nature of the subject teacher is meant to motivate the students; however, students like Ankita have got negative motivation from it. Instead of being motivated, she pressured herself to be best before the teacher, which led to excessive anxiety for her. Talking about the fear of competition, another participant, Sagar, shared a similar type of expectation:

I always feel nervous about my English exams because I struggle with writing under pressure. I know all my classmates will see my score, and they might tease me. (looking on the floor) I remember once (pause...) a friend got good marks, and everyone praised her. I felt happy for her but also terrible about myself because my score was much lower. For the next exam, I only thought about how everyone would react if I got lower marks again. The fear of not measuring up and being seen as less intelligent is always in the back of my mind, making me forget everything during examination time.

The narratives of my participants illustrate the profound impact of extrinsic factors on examination anxiety, generally in English. The common thread among these students is the immense pressure from social comparisons and competitive environments, which significantly heighten their anxiety. Raj's constant comparison with his brother undermined his confidence, while Ankita felt the weight of her teacher's expectations and peer competition. Bebisha's story highlights the unintended negative consequences of competitive academic incentives, and Sagar's experience reveals the fear of peer judgment and its paralyzing effect on his performance. These external pressures, whether from parents, teachers, or the broader school environment, create a constant fear of failure and not meeting expectations, which intensifies their anxiety.

High parental Expectation

The pressure of examination, especially in a subject like English, can be influenced by external factors. After listening to the deep insights of my participants, I found that the pressure of parents to achieve the highest grades in examinations is another cause of anxiety among my participants. This anxiety often stems from a pervasive sense of comparison and competition, where students feel they must not only excel academically but also live up to the expectations set by their families. In this context, the experiences of students like Pooja, Raj, Ankita, and Sagar highlight

how parental expectations can exacerbate exam-related stress, leading to a heightened fear of failure and a diminished sense of self-worth. By examining these narratives, we can better understand the impact of parental pressure on students' academic performance and overall mental well-being. Talking about parental pressure, Pooja said,

My parents always tell me about the importance of the English language and how it is essential to be the best in English, and for that, it is necessary to achieve high grades in English examinations. They always see my score sheet and ask several questions about why I always get low grades in English. Why do I always feel sick during and before the English examination? Sometimes, even my father scolded me by saying I was making a drama of being sick because I didn't know anything, and I pretended to be sick to justify my lower grade in English.

Pooja's situation is also like that of my other participants. One of the causes of English exam anxiety is her parents' pressure on her to achieve high marks in English written examinations. Similarly, regarding parental pressure, my other participants also narrated similar types of pressure to score high in English. My other participant, Bebisha, had a similar issue; she was excellent in another subject except English, and she had the pressure to score good marks in English. She mentioned that,

My parents always ask why I am not getting good marks in English. Generally, my mother asked me why I did not score good marks after preparing a lot. I also didn't know why. I always tried my best to score good marks in English so my parents would be happy, but every time, I disappointed them.

In conclusion, from the students' insights, we conclude that parental pressure is

one of the external factors that causes this. Parents pressured their children to score good marks, and instead of being motivated, they got stressed, which negatively impacted their English exam scores.

The insights of my participants disclose the vital impact of external factors on English examination anxiety. Ankita talks about how the comparing nature of her English teacher had a negative impact on her, and she had a higher level of anxiety as a result. Similarly, Sagar's fear of competition and peer judgment increased his nervousness and made it difficult to perform under high stress. Similarly, Raj's

parents constantly compare him with his brother, which decreases his self-confidence, and Bebisha's story is like others. These in-depth lived experiences illustrate or prove how comparison and competitive environments intensify examination stress or pressure by creating a constant threat of failure or scoring low marks for my participants. Not only that, but also high pressure from the parents for a good score contributed to anxiety among my participants, which is proved by the narratives of my participants. Pooja's insights highlight how her parents' pressure on the importance of getting good in English leads to increased stress and a vanished sense of self-worth. These factors pressure the students to score high marks in examinations. As a result, they got stressed, and instead of getting high, they scored low.

Instructional Environment and Testing Framework

The foundation for testing and the instructional environment following their detailed accounts, my participant revealed that the exam's format—particularly its time limit—and the upkeep of the testing facility were additional outside factors that contributed to their anxiousness. The relationship the student had with the topic teacher was another intriguing feature. A suitable atmosphere and setting are necessary for successful outcomes, particularly concerning exams. Occasionally, a person's minor problems might significantly impact how tough and stressed out another person feels. My participants provided further insight into the examination setting, including seating arrangements and invigilators' conduct, about the external cause instructional environment and testing framework. About this source of anxiety, all of my participants discussed that they were more or less affected by the examination environment during their English examination. One of my participants, Dinesh, whose condition was severe among others, mentioned the two pressure factors in the examination. Dinesh said that,

Generally, all subject exams were strictly done. We didn't get a chance to ask our teachers and friends questions. I don't feel difficulty other times but feel disturbed for a few reasons. Some invigilators scolded us in a loud voice without any reason, and sometimes, our English teacher came and reminded us to score better marks on the previous exam. Not only that, but constant reminders about the time also make me stressed, especially in English exams, because I already started thinking I couldn't attempt all the questions this time, and if I hear I have limited time, I feel a kind of fear that makes me forget all the answers.

Dinesh's insights made clear that the time constraint and the attitude of the invigilator played a crucial role in anxiety in the examination. Additionally, another participant, Raj, had a similar view about the environment of the examination hall. He said that,

I don't feel much difference in another subject exam; however, during the English exam, I felt I didn't understand many of the questions or some were unfamiliar. I talked about my confusion with my invigilator, but he replied harshly, saying I was trying to find the answer cleverly by asking him. I requested to call my subject teacher also, but he didn't by replying she was not allowed to explain questions at the exam. Moreover, he said the subject teacher should teach in class, not in exams. I felt terrible and ashamed before my classmates in the room. So, I couldn't answer all my questions, which happened several times.

The insights of my respondents presented the aspects of how extrinsic factors were the cause of their English examination anxiety, emphasizing the roles played by social comparison, the competition among their peers, the high expectations of their parents, and the environment during the examination. These external factors pressurized my respondents connected with their cognitive abilities and their potentiality hindered under the anxiety. As narrated by Raj, Ankita, and Sagar, the strong comparison with peers created a kind of stress and burden that weighed heavily on them, especially during English exams. Ankita struggled to impress her English teacher and prove herself among her friends, showing her stressed and burdened mind to become an excellent. This stress, instead of motivating her, led to examination anxiety. Similarly, Bebish's account of her school's competitive environment, where academic excellence in English is rewarded with a good name and many opportunities, discovers how these rewards, though intended to motivate, can instead induce anxiety. Sagar's fear of his friends, stemming from his belief that classmates might mock his lower scores, highlights how the social aspects of competition can lead to self-doubt and performance anxiety. Likewise, parents' pressure, teachers' attitudes, and the examination environment also played a crucial role in the cause of English examination anxiety among my participants.

Part of Intrinsic Factors in My Participants' Anxiety

After thoroughly explaining the external elements that influence my participants' fear, I focused on my informants' psychological and internal aspects,

which are the main causes of my participants' worry related to the English written test. Important roles are played by internal elements in determining the anxiety levels of my responders. It is not the same as the apparent external pressure. These internal factors, frequently resulting in self-doubt, fear, tension, a lack of confidence, etc., were the primary source of their pressure and worry. Here, we're looking at a distinct and striking image of the important internal elements that influence my participants' anxiety.

Fear of Failing and Low Self-Esteem in English Proficiency

Examining the internal factors contributing to anxiety among my participants, the insights revealed that the most significant aspect of the cause of anxiety among my participants is fear of failure as well as very low self-confidence in English subject exams. Fear of failing or not getting expected marks, which led to low self-confidence, is deeply intertwined with the anxiety my informants experienced during and before their English written examination. Some expressed constant fear of them due to a lack of grammatical skills, and some said they feared relating to experience or result. Among the participants, Pooja said,

I don't know what happened to me before and during my English examination. I felt like I would fail, and my preparation was insufficient, especially in grammar. I felt like I would forget all the answers, whatever I did to remember, and I felt fear. It happened in every exam, and I didn't want to take my exam because I knew that whatever I did, I would never get good marks in English.

Pooja's fear and low confidence made her believe she would never achieve good marks in English written examinations. In the same manner, another participant also experienced a similar issue. Sagar has also been affected by fear and low confidence during examinations. His experience of sudden stress and fear of not doing well made him less confident. He mentioned that,

I am always afraid of English examinations. When I think about my English exam, my heart starts beating fast. I am not going to do well this time too. Last time, during my English exam day, my hands started shaking, and I couldn't focus or write well. It happened every time with me during my English exam. I am sure I will never do well on the English examination.

Sagar's experience is also similar to that of Pooja. Due to his fear of achieving low marks, his self-confidence became low. One of the causes of not doing well in

exams is a lack of confidence and fear of failure, leading to stress and creating examination anxiety in Sagar.

Self -Doubt and Performance Anxiety

Self-doubt and performance anxiety were examined as another inherent element that became the contributing factor to Ankita's distress and anxiety. Her lack of confidence and self-doubt is a vital source that created anxiety for her. She shed light on her doubt as I felt I lacked many subtopics and other elements to prepare compared to my classmates. She said,

Whenever I think about my preparation for the English examination, I get feedback that I needed to do more to get the expected result. The more I tried to improve by practicing grammar by writing essays and stories, the more I felt that was not enough to get my dream marks. I asked myself why this happened to me in this English subject. I felt very tense whenever my English exam came. I was thinking about this time on the examination day and before the whole time. Also, I wouldn't get my dream marks in English, which would come true in every exam.

Similarly, another participant, Dinesh, revealed a similar type of issue. He also suffered from a lack of confidence and self-doubt. He stated that:

I didn't know why I was thinking about the English exam only despite giving more time for this subject. The more I prepared, the less I could remember in the exam, and it happened to me almost every time. After reading all day and night, I felt, in an exam, that question would come which I didn't know, and to my surprise... (pause and laughs) exactly happened the same, and if the prepared question came, I also forgot.

The narratives of Ankita and Dinesh both equally exemplify their fights with self-doubt and inadequacy and their opinion of their lackluster preparation for the written English exam. Ankita said her persistent struggles with comprehending English grammar and vocabulary led to self-doubt, and her feelings of adequacy were accelerated by the fact that although she sincerely gave time for this subject, she didn't achieve the expected result in any of the examinations. She explained how her mind would rush with prior failures and the idea that no amount of preparation would ever be enough to get her dream marks in the written examination of English. Similarly, Dinesh conveyed a strong sense of helplessness and annoyance, believing

that his efforts to learn were insufficient to have the expected outcomes in English subjects.

Impact of Negative Past Experiences

Exam stress anxiety is mostly brought on by previous experiences that went poorly, and this can have a lasting impact on students' future academic success. After a challenging exam or a poor performance, many people experience anxiety and self-consciousness because they think they will repeat the same mistakes. When students feel anxious, it's typically because they believe that the mistakes they made in the past will happen again, which lowers their self-esteem and causes them to worry about impending exams. In addition to potentially affecting their concentration and output, these occurrences or circumstances might contribute to a vicious cycle of tension and worry that is hard to escape.

Effects of Prior Failures on Bebisha, Raj and Sagar

Bebisha was suffering from extreme stress during and before the time of English examination, and the contributing factor to her anxiety was her previous bad experiences. Remembering her negative experiences of the past time, Bebisha mentioned that,

My final exam in English was taught around two years ago. When I was in class eight, it was destroyed due to my sickness. Despite feeling physically weak, I prepared a lot; however, I found the questions very difficult, and I could not attempt them all. I was thinking more and more about this, especially during each English examination. My disability to concentrate and perform to my expectations gives me tension in every exam, and I couldn't skip the fear of failure of the past time again and again.

This narration of Bebisha reveals how she was deeply affected by the stress and trauma of failing her previous English two years before. This failure caused a fear within her to fail repeatedly, impacting her even in the present preparation for this subject. In the same manner, another participant, Raj, shed light on how his past failures are creating persistent anxiety and stress in him for the written examination of English. He shared that:

I frequently experienced sudden blanking out during my previous English exam. I could not attempt all the questions that time despite my hard work. I could not remember any answer, which I had prepared a lot of. Now, in every

English exam, I remember the same situation and was afraid that it would happen again, and you don't believe it happened to me again and again.

Raj's experience in these past events was when his performances were disrupted despite his good preparation, and he could not perform according to his expectations. He felt extremely stressed out by the imagination that his experience would repeat, which made it impossible for him to take examinations in the upcoming time without being paralyzed by uncertainty and anxiety.

Similarly, Sagar shared similar bad experiences from the previous time. He shared his worst experience as,

I remember my English exam of the previous year, which was not the final exam, but also, at that time, I couldn't write correctly. I was unable to focus because my hands were shaking. I got an NG in English for that exam. I had paid total attention to my exam then; however, I failed in English, which knocked my heart loudly in every English exam. Previous experiences exacerbate Sagar's nervousness and make it difficult for him to maintain it, and his performance is impacted by his worry, which is based on his previous experiences.

These experiences of Bebish, Raj, and Sagar towards the written examination of English have been impacted by their previous negative and worst experiences. They cannot cope with these previous problems and fear that they may happen repeatedly, which also keeps them stuck in a vicious cycle of worry and self-doubt that impairs their academic performance.

Fear of Judgment and Self-Perception

Many students suffer from extreme anxiety and pressure, especially due to their fear of being judged and their low self-perception. Anxiety can be raised, and academic achievements are negatively impacted by the extreme pressure to live up to the expectations of others and try not to disappoint them. The narratives of Pooja, Ankita, Dinesh, and Sagar shared their experience of how these fears demonstrate and impact their exam performance.

Pooja felt extreme pressure and worry before her English examination because she was afraid that her English teacher would be very critical of her and that she would not do well in her English exam. This situation made it difficult for her to focus and remember her prepared materials. She shared her experiences as,

I always wanted to score good marks in my English exams because if we got good marks, then our English teacher would praise us in front of the whole class, but if we didn't get good marks, I was always afraid that she would give advice in front of the whole class and my all friends would tease me after her suggestion to improve my English examination.

In contrast, Ankita's fear of the English exam and low confidence originated from the extreme humiliation at the thought of her friends if they had known about her poor performance. She also suffered from test anxiety, which she attributed to her dread of being judged by her peers. In her words,

I was always afraid that if I didn't get good marks in English, my friends would make fun of me and tease me in the name of my lower grades in English. I felt nervous thinking about what my classmates would say about me and my grades and unable to focus on my studies.

Similarly, Dinesh was always worried about his parent's disapproval and the potential damage to his image should he fail to get passing grades. Dinesh confessed that he was terrified of being judged, but this issue was mostly connected to how he assumed himself. He shared his experience as,

My English was not excellent compared to others. Every time I took an English exam, I performed poorly, increasing my sense of inadequacy. So, I felt nervous when I learned that my friends were better than me.

Dinesh's experiences shed light on his fear of being judged and his low self-esteem when comparing himself with his friends. Another participant, Sagar, shared his story of how his nervousness was increased by the opinions and judgments of his family. He disclosed his experience as,

My parents always wanted me to score good grades in all subjects, especially English. They believe I should know the English language to shape my good career. If I didn't receive the expected grade in English, I felt bad that I could not meet my parents' expectations. I felt bad when they talked about my other friends and compared their good grades with my low grades. By thinking that I tried my best to attempt nicely, but suddenly, my hands started shaking, and that made me accomplish my exam with the expected outcomes.

These experiences of Pooja, Ankita Dinesh, and Sagar demonstrate the vital impact of poor individual perception and fear of judgment. This stress created diverse psychological obstacles and impairs their focus efficiency in the classroom and the

overall performance of the students.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the second-last chapter, I reflected on the feelings and experiences of the respondents for deeper insights into their perspectives. As shared in this discussion, the emotional reactions will be interpreted within the broader contexts of themes from the literature review. Such analysis will provide further details on how such feelings impinge on or affect the behavioral patterns and attitudes of the respondents by connecting them with theoretical and individual experiences mentioned in other sections of the study.

Test anxiety and stress are serious problems that affect students' academic performance and psychological health. This study studied secondary-level students' anxiety and tension during their English test writing. Learning the English language is a topic that frequently bears extra stress because of its perceived difficulty and importance to academic achievement. To better understand the lived experiences of participants managing the stress of high-stakes testing, Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis was used. Six secondary-level students participated in in-depth interviews for the study, which allowed the study to capture the interaction of cognitive, psychological, and somatic symptoms that define test anxiety. The debate tries to identify the fundamental causes of anxiety and investigate the effects of these stresses on anxiety by looking at these unique tales.

To find out the nature of test anxiety and the elements that cause test anxiety in written examinations of English are the main two purposes of this study. Different literature reveals that many students of any level and age may get stress and anxiety before and during the time of examination of any particular subject or all. The manifestation of anxiety may vary according to the age and level of the students, and the reason also may differ from one to another. There are many similar ideas found about the nature of test anxiety. Dawood et al. (2016) found that students who were stressed had low scores due to the impact of anxiety. Moreover, their findings of anxiety as physical, psychological, and cognitive were somehow similar to my respondents. Similarly, Steinmyar et al. (2016) and Sabti et al. (2019) explored the students who frequently attacked with examination anxiety and often showed worry

and stress during and before the examination. The ideas of most of the scholars reviewed in this research are connected with my participants' nature of anxiety.

The things that make my participants anxious differ from their physical, psychological, and cognitive manifestations in a few ways. Their stories point out the psychological aspect of academic performance, *i.e.*, *their success* or failure is not determined only by their cognitive abilities but also by their emotional and psychological state. Students' experiences with anxiety-inducing factors include negative past experiences, teacher motivation that turned out to be negative and a source of fear, rewards as a source of anxiety, parents' constant comparison, and participants' low self-esteem. These are some of the new findings that are rarely covered in previous studies about anxiety, its causes, and its effects on academic achievements. So, the discussion based on the participant's data was described in the different sub-headings below.

Diverse Dimensions of Students' Anxiety

After hearing the students and delving into them, I discovered that various students had distinct types of anxiety. The three primary categories used to describe the nature of anxiety in the participants are bodily symptoms, psychological symptoms, and cognitive barriers. Thus, the discussion was organized into several subsections following their in-depth narratives and firsthand accounts.

Physiological Manifestations of Exam Anxiety

Some symptoms of anxiousness that my participants frequently experienced before and during the written English exam were shallow breathing, perspiration on their palms, a racing heartbeat, etc. The physical symptoms of stress and anxiety are examined in this segment of the debate by my six secondary-level student participants, who offered their in-depth observations and personal experiences. Anxiety and stress are commonly seen as psychological phenomena, yet they can manifest as a range of physical symptoms. The participants in my study displayed a variety of anxiety types, which are classified as physical symptoms of anxiety. Here, the nature of anxiety is discussed for each participant.

Individual Narratives and Their Analysis

My first participant, Ankita, felt the fastness of her heartbeat as if she was able to listen to it loudly. She was well before the English examination, but her hands started shaking during the examination. Ankita's intense response reveals how her body reacted or showed her stress symptoms from the examination. As a result,

Ankita's physical symptoms of anxiety included a racing heartbeat, trembling in the hand after receiving the question paper, and unusual perspiration in both the body and the hand. This finding is closely connected to Rodriguez-Arce et al. (2020), who state that these physiological traits can be used to predict stress and anxiety in academic settings. Here, he studied twenty-one physiological characteristics of five signals, and a stress-inducing strategy was also suggested.

Similarly, another participant, Raj, disclosed how her body reacted or behaved differently before and during the English examination. According to him, he was thinking about the English examination because of his lower grades in English. However, that day, his stomachache, even though he got the tablets from his mother, didn't work, and later, it worsened. Raj experienced repeated signs such as stomachache, fever, and diarrhea, suggesting extreme stress on him, and the stress of an English examination influenced it. These physical symptoms often restricted him from fully performing in his written English examination. This aligns with Jerrim's (2023) claim that anxiety and academic performance are often negatively correlated, and worry can seriously impair students' academic performance, especially in high-stakes testing situations. Raj's symptoms, which result in incomplete exam attempts and lower performance, illustrate how anxiety can perpetuate a cycle of stress and underachievement.

My third participant, Sagar, reported physical discomfort and symptoms similar to those of other participants. His experience demonstrated severe physical symptoms like a loud heartbeat, racing heartbeat, feeling of unfamiliarity with the practiced questions too, and frequent need to go to short toilet or irregular urination. When he shared that he nearly lost control over his body, I was surprised by the level of anxiety on him due to the pressure of the English examination. These signs of Sagar point to the possibility that Sagar may have panic attacks and more severe types of anxiety, which can impact and trouble his normal functioning and daily life. His inability to attempt the questions, control his body, and finish the exam on time are the consequences of his examination anxiety and stress. According to Jerrim (2023), there is a well-documented negative relationship between anxiety and academic performance, particularly when anxiety reaches levels that disrupt normal functioning, as seen in Sagar's case.

An Analysis of Physical Symptoms and Their Significance

The narratives shared by Ankita, Raj, and Sagar provide in-depth insights into anxiety and indicate the various forms of stress, from moderate to severe or lower to higher. Ankita had moderate type of physical symptoms due to anxiety; however, these symptoms were the barrier to her academic achievement in the English written examination, and her performance was disturbed due to this physical barrier caused by anxiety and stress of the English written examination. In comparison to Ankita, Raj had more severe symptoms as they could lead him to panic attacks, and they were responsible for his non-grade marks in the English written examination. Raj's anxiety-related physical indicators are more intense, resulting in physical illness that is directly connected with the academic result and his inability to complete his exam within the given time. Among the analysis of three participants, Sagar had shown the most severe level of physical discomfort. He was so anxious that he nearly lost control of his body.

My three participants shared how anxiety negatively impacted their academic outcomes; however, the range or level of stress among them varies from one to another. Despite sharing different opinions and physical symptoms, all of them shared a common fight: the fight against anxiety occurs especially before and during the time of written English examination, which became the reason for the disruption in their ability to perform well in English written examinations. The physical symptoms they experience due to anxiety, whether it's a racing heart, stomach pain, or intense panic, all interfere with their learning and academic progress. This discussion examined the Physical indicators among my participants due to stress and anxiety that occurred before and during the time of written examination of English and how they impacted their ability to perform well and achieve the expected result. These results are consistent with a study by Steinmyer et al. (2016), which highlighted the relationship between test anxiety, subjective well-being, and performance, stating the damage anxiety would cause to students' performance. Sabti et al. (2019) also established that students chronically beset by examination anxiety would exhibit elevated worry and stress levels, thus confirming the experiences of the participants. Additionally, Rodríguez-Arce et al. (2020) highlighted how stress response at the physiological level, such as increased heart rates and focus, may at times indicate preparedness to tackle challenging coursework. These various views highlight the complexity of anxiety in academic environments, where excessive amounts are regarded as being

negative, but some may, at times, help bring desirable outcomes when adequately managed.

Examining Psychological Symptoms of Anxiety

After the detailed description of the physical discomfort that my participants experienced, they also revealed the psychological symptoms that they were facing during and before the English examination. These narratives of the participants shed light on their experiences and how stress and anxiety impacted their academic experiences and achievements, particularly before and during the time of written English examination. These narratives demonstrate how each participant experienced and how their anxiety is similar or varies in terms of the physical symptoms they are experiencing.

Pooja's Experience of Being Overly Aware and Critical of Herself

Pooja's narratives about her examination stress and anxiety reveal how she negatively talked to herself and how she was critical of herself, which distracted her from her concentration and expected performance. She was trying to normalize her anxiety by biting the pen consistently; however, her inner voice threatened her to expect failure before completing the examination. This fear explains her inner fear of being watched by everyone in the examination hall, and accepting failure before completing the examination demonstrates how her academic performance is impacted by the anxiety that she was experiencing. Her experience shows how examination or test anxiety can lead to poor performance and self-criticism among students by causing reduced focus and less confidence and fear among them.

Bebisha's Experience: Mental Stress and Perceptual Deviation

Another participant, Bebishha, also experienced similar types of psychological distress and discomfort in both as perceived and received. Her experience in the written examination of English shed light on how intensely she suffered from examination anxiety, especially anxiety in the written examination of English. Her narratives pictured the moment when anxiety not only became the barrier to her ability to perform well but also made her distressed and uncomfortable by changing her opinion of reality, leading her to vital emotional and cognitive impacts. The most recent studies on the topic are presented by Heissel et al. (2021). This research covers how the physiological stress responses of students change between regular school weeks and high-stakes testing weeks.

Bebisha's experiences demonstrate that the social circumstances in the examination room intensified her reaction when she saw her English question paper and assumed it was blank. Her experience of feeling embraced and desolated among her classmates and their funny reactions to her created low confidence in her; however, the teacher's support made her a little easier.

Even after the teacher's suggestion, she could not overpower the emotion and stress within her. Her confidence became already disabled after the first shock of her friends' laughter and her blackout. Despite restoring her strength, she chose to leave the exam early, which indicates how she was affected by the examination anxiety of the English written exam. Despite her hard work, she could not perform well, which impacted her academic achievements.

Bebisha's insights and her lived experience shed light on the issue of examination anxiety and how she was experiencing examination anxiety, suffering from different psychological distress. This psychological nature of anxiety is revealed after preparing and trying their best, how Bebishia was not able to perform well in the written examination of English and achieve the expected result. According to Nathaniel Van dor Embse et al. (2018) about the psychological symptoms of examination anxiety, the components and their corresponding categories are affective/psychological, for example, emotionality, tension, bodily symptoms, autonomic reactions, as well as behavioral, off-task behaviors, and social, social derogation and cognitive as example worry, test-irrelevant thoughts, worrisome thoughts, cognitive obstruction.

Dinesh's Story of Hopelessness and Panic

Another participant, Dinesh, also experienced similar types of psychological discomfort and distress during the time of written examination of English. His narrations vividly portrayed how general stress and worry suddenly turned into serious panic attacks and psychological distress. Dinesh was confident before the exam because he was prepared and entered the examination hall because this time, he assured himself to perform well. But the moment he entered the examination room, he began to tremble and sweat abnormally, which showed his anxiety and fear of the English examination.

The experience of Dinesh demonstrates that although he had prepared a lot this time by taking the lesson of a previous low grade in English, his stress and anxiety led him towards uncontrolled frustration and a traumatic situation when he

was unable to remember the answer he prepared through his hard work. His failure to grab well-prepared answers increased his sense of inadequacy and despair. The situation took such a toll on his feelings that following the exam, he tried to harm himself by taking his life. Dinesh experiences highlight the extremely harmful impact of examination anxiety on mental health. It draws attention to how examination anxiety can lead to severe emotional distress in students that can result in unbearable consequences.

The psychological experiences narrated by the participants picturized the variation and psychological nature of anxiety disorders. These symptoms not only show the different ways anxiety can be experienced cognitively and behaviorally but also show the vital impact these disorders have on various aspects of life, including social interactions, occupational performance, and overall well-being. Beck and Clark (1997) said there are many ways of experiencing anxiety that differ from one another. Anxiety can vary from slight fear to severe panic attacks, and they can impact our daily activities as well as academic performance.

Examiners' Cognitive Difficulties: A Conversation

Exams are repeated and highly stressful situations that can cause general stress and fear as well as cognitive challenges to students of all ages and levels, and they are directly connected with the achievement of the student's performance. It explores the many cognitive obstacles that my participants experienced during and before the English examination, such as regular negative thinking, misinterpreting the direction given in the questions, overanalyzing the questions, and sudden mental blockage at the time of examination. The consequences and lived experiences are discussed in relation to the participants' individual experiences.

Pressure-induced Mental Blockage

Participants often reported their experience of mental blockage under pressure, which is characterized by stress and worry that trigger them to forget their well-prepared answers. Dinesh experienced a mental block that created stress and worries in him, and he was not able to perform well when he started writing answers; due to this mental block, he forgot all the answers, and he was not able to write the examination of English. This experience of Dinesh can be aligned with Westhoff et al. (2024), who characterized cognitive inflexibility as a perspective through which to understand this issue where examination of anxiety and fear resulted in a mental blank. Westhoff suggested that it entails a propensity to avoid stressful situations and

excessive attachment to specific cognitive activities. In the highly distressful situations when Dinesh needed to attempt his responses, he went through under pressure. As a result, he felt mind blockage, preventing him from performing well in his English examination.

Dinesh's cognitive stiffness was triggered by the pressure of remembering his answers under stress and pressure. His increased anxiousness restricted him from changing the way that he was thinking by using other techniques, which created extreme pressure on him and caused a mental blockage on him, which restricted him from recalling his answers and performing well in his English examination. Dinesh's experience vividly portrayed cognitive inflexibility, which may show up in everyday life, especially during and before the examination time when you are under pressure to take an exam on any subject, which creates anxiety. Dinesh's insight clearly illustrates cognitive rigidity in action, which can harm academic performances and learning achievements.

Ankita shared a similar insight relating to the experience of mind blockage by saying that despite practicing the questions many times, she felt the questions were very unfamiliar to her. Eysenck et al. (2007) state that the brain puts immediate survival ahead of the learning process, including information processing and memorization, when this type of reaction is influenced. As a result, there is a vital compromise in the ability to process and retrieve information efficiently. In Ankita's situation, the start of exam anxiety was most likely to trigger her brain to fight with the familiar question that seemed to be unfamiliar to her. Her story exemplifies how worry affects cognitive function, especially in stressful situations, such as English examination times for Ankita and Dinesh.

Misreading the Instructions

Misreading and misinterpreting the instructions were found to be another important cognitive barrier, especially when stress and anxiety were present in my participants. Raj brought attention to this problem by describing how he misread the instructions given during English examination time despite the hard preparation and listening to the teacher's directions. Raj's story demonstrates how stress and worry can disrupt cognitive functioning. Raj became anxious during the time of his English exam, and as a result, he rushed reading and had an incorrect understanding of instructions.

Students' propensity to speed through exam questions out of increased stress and concern of running out of time is a common cognitive effect of anxiety. This issue might arise from errors like misreading instructions or not comprehending what is expected of a response. According to the research of Owens et al. (2012), anxiety raises cognitive load, which decreases student's ability to absorb information correctly and deliberately. In such circumstances, students could be more concerned about completing the examination than doing that accurately. The findings of their research can align with Raj's description.

Ankita also had a similar story; she discovered her experience by saying she didn't know how she read the questions inside the examination hall for English subjects and how the questions changed when she went outside the exam hall. This incident of Ankita and Raj shed light on the negative impact that anxiety-related cognitive barriers have on students' performance. Misreading the instructions causes students to write the answers incorrectly and waste important examination time. This incident of Ankita proves that her frequently reading the questions incorrectly is the result of stress and anxiety due to the written examination of English. These insights of the participants shed light on the need to treat anxiety as a vital issue affecting exam achievement. They draw attention to how anxiety-driven cognitive hurdles might result in avoidable errors that harm the performance of the students in their written English exams.

Overanalyzing the Questions

A further major cognitive barrier mentioned by participants was overanalyzing questions. Ankita explained how she would become stuck on a challenging topic and unable to continue, even knowing the answers to the following questions. This conduct demonstrates the obsessive thought patterns frequently observed in anxious people, where an excessive focus on a single-issue result from a concern about making mistakes or not knowing the answer (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Sagar also said that he wasted time and experienced heightened frustration when he couldn't answer a question that he didn't know the answer to. Overanalyzing questions leads to ineffective time management, which compounds stress levels and negatively impacts exam outcomes.

Adverse Thought Pattern

Among my participants, negative thinking patterns proved to be another significant cognitive hurdle. Exam anxiety was exacerbated by these ideas, which

frequently proved to be fears of being judged and a lack of confidence. Dinesh's narratives aptly demonstrate this. Self-criticism like this can significantly impair a student's ability to concentrate and retain information when anxiety diverts attention from the task at hand (Derakshan & Eysenck, 2009). Bebisa also talked about how biting her pen and nails were physical symptoms of her anxiety, and she also noted feeling as though other students were seeing her struggle: *"I felt like everyone was staring at me, and they knew I didn't know the answer."* I became terrified as my vision became hazy.

Analyzing Students' Concerns Regarding English Exam Anxiety

In response to my second research question – what factors or elements cause anxiety in students – the students shared different and interesting factors that contributed to anxiety before and during the time of their English examination. Several elements played a vital role in causing anxiety in my six participants. To explore these issues, I categorized the factors causing anxiety in their written English as external and internal factors. Students' internalized emotions, attitudes, and sentiments, such as lack of confidence, fear, etc., are described as intrinsic or internal factors, and external factors focused on peer and parental pressure, fear of judgment, and the expectation of English teachers as described by the participants.

Personal Experiences: Talk bout External Factors that Contribute to Anxiety

Examination anxiety among my participants is impacted by a variety of external pressures and expectations, which are all interconnected and harm my participants diversely. These components include social dynamics among peers, academic competition, teacher pressure on the students, and high familiar or parental expectations. These factors differently impact every student, and those factors contribute to their anxiety in English written exams in different ways.

Raj is frequently compared with his siblings in terms of academic achievements. Raj's experience with test anxiety is significantly influenced by the continued comparison with his big brother, who does very well and as expect in all subjects, especially in English. Raj's parents' constant attention to his English grades made him feel insufficient and frustrated. According to McHale et al. (2012), the rivalry between siblings and comparison-induced stress describes this condition, which frequently occurs in kids compared to high-achieving siblings. Raj discovered that his parents frequently discussed his brother's proficiency in English as a standard demarcation for what Raj should strive for whenever they discussed his results at

home. Raj became generally stressed and anxious about the examination result of this English subject, which made him lose faith in his English proficiency. Raj felt worse and underachieved because of the public character of this comparison, especially before the relatives and friends. The pressure of failing that results from feeling you can never measure up to your brother's achievement severely impacted Raj's emotional well-being and academic achievement.

The narratives of Raj disclosed the severe impact that comparison between siblings had on students' anxiety about their academic performance and sense of individuality. Previous studies have shown that this type of comparison can cause demotivating situations and a sense of lowered self-worth. According to Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), Continuous negative comparisons between siblings can create demotivation and less individuality among students, which results in severe anxiety which results in very low academic performance of the person. Raj experienced exam anxiety on his written English exam, which permeated his academic achievements. He felt pressure to perform well in English written examinations because he feared always being scrutinized and compared. The story of Raj highlights the complex interactions between family relationships and academic anxiety, showing how the constant comparison of parents with their siblings can be the extrinsic contributing factors for anxiety among students.

Exam anxiety is closely related to Ankita's expectations from her English teacher and the constant comparisons she faces with her peers. This pressure from an authoritative source generates a complicated dynamic that has significant effects on her academic achievement and mental health. Ankita's teacher constantly pushed her to raise her English test scores, emphasizing how other kids with comparable skills performed better. Ankita explained how her teacher gave her feedback and gave concrete examples of her peers scoring higher even though their thoughts and skills were comparable.

Although Ankita's English teacher intended to inspire and motivate Ankita, she was adversely affected by this continual comparison with her classmates. Pressure and stress were growing inside her, and she wanted to perform better than her friends to impress and meet her teacher's expectations. Because of the constant comparisons made by her English teacher, Ankita's self-worth became strongly connected with her performance compared to others, creating a competitive environment outside and inside her mind. Outside pressures, including academic performance and rivalry, tend

to internalize striving to succeed as a benchmark of self-worth, leading to anxiety and stress. Research, such as Gobena (2024) and Li and Palaroan (2024), focuses on the way these pressures impact students' emotional states and academic performance negatively, explaining the intricate connection between outside pressures and psychological responses.

The narratives shared by Ankita emphasize how critical it is to comprehend how the teacher's expectations affect the student's nervousness. According to this, even while the teacher wants to motivate and inspire the students on their subject, that may harm them, as in Ankita. So, the expectations of her English teacher are one of the extrinsic factors that contribute to anxiety and stress in Ankita in her written examination of English.

Bebisha's fear of the English exam is connected with the competitive ethos of her school and the public acclaim given to the high-rank achievers. Her school is widely known for its academic prowess and often motivates students by giving prizes and extra incentives to students who perform best in their English exams, creating a highly competitive environment. Although the objective of providing these prizes was to inspire and motivate the students, Bebishia was experiencing unexpected effects of stress and anxiety during the time of her English examination. Bebishia explained how the constant emphasis on academic rankings and rewards created major stress for her.

During the English exam, she was thinking about her classmates and their performance rather than doing better for herself. The thought of not doing well compared with my topper friends made her extremely nervous. She started doubting herself, and rather than focus on her English studies, she began to think about achieving higher positions, according to her classmates. The experience of Bebishia demonstrates how her fear and self-doubt escalated due to the competitive incentives rather than creating motivation in her. English exam anxiety resulted from the school environment; the contributing factor was the prizes given by her English teacher. It is connected with her classmate's expectations and losing out on important opportunities. The discussion switched from learning and personal development to vying for prestige and recognition, which was one of the external factors of anxiety Bebishia had in her written examination of English.

Sagar's fear of being judged by his peers is closely linked to his exam anxiety. His performance on English examinations is greatly impacted by this anxiety since the pressure to do well and prevent receiving negative feedback from peers creates a

stressful testing atmosphere. Sagar explained that his fear of fellow students seeing his test results and maybe making fun of him if he does poorly make him anxious about English examinations. The query of how social relations might affect academic anxiety is larger, and Sagar's anecdote serves as a vivid example. A culture of rivalry that exacerbates stress can be fostered in the classroom, where pupils are frequently judged on their performance. Students like Sagar find this atmosphere especially difficult since they are nervous about being viewed as less capable by their peers and are sensitive to peer opinions. Sagar experiences long-lasting effects on his academic career in addition to being unable to concentrate during tests due to his anxiety about being judged by his peers. The constant worry about negative evaluation creates heightened stress, making it difficult for him to concentrate and perform to the best of his abilities. This aligns with research indicating that performance anxiety linked to social evaluation can lead to cognitive interference, where students' ability to focus and recall information is compromised (Zeidner, 1998). For Sagar, the anxiety of being evaluated and the worry that he won't measure up to his friends' level have been significant hurdles to his academic progress in the English subject. A supportive classroom climate that addresses the emotional and psychological elements of academic achievement in English is crucial, as seen by the cycle of self-doubt and underperformance.

Another extrinsic factor that contributed to the anxiety of my participant Pooja was her concern over the English exam connected with her high parental expectations. Pooja has a great deal of emotional strain due to this pressure, which was especially concentrated on doing well in English examinations. Pooja said her parents had always emphasized her need to perform well in English as they believed that language competency would be crucial to her future success. Due to her focus on English as a must for success in both school and business, Pooja is experiencing a great deal of stress. Pooja's experience seemed bitter when she shared that her father had untrusted her fabricated medical excuses to hide her poor performance in the English examination. Pooja's feeling of inadequacy and failure due to being accused by her father made her extremely stressed. She felt more anxious and less confident due to the burden of defending herself against such charges.

Pooja's story depicts the significant influence that parental expectation had on the students' mental health and scholastic achievement. Her condition can be aligned with the research by Miller (2000), who found that kids who have high parental

expectations for the best academic achievements experience more stress and anxiety in fulfilling their parents' expectations. Pooja experiences severe exam anxiety due to a variety of circumstances, including constant pressure from the public and her desire to receive top scores in English.

Role that Time Limitations Play in Increasing Exam Anxiety

The experiences that the participants shared portrayed that time boundaries are a significant source of concern for students before exams. Dinesh's story presents a summarized perspective on how time limitation can increase stress and negatively impact performance. He explained how his anxiety increased during English examinations due to the continuous reminder of left time, which resulted in panic attacks that made it more difficult to remember the answers. This narration of Dinesh shed light on the time limitation, and its reminder also harmed student achievement. A sense of urgency brought on by the warning bell had caused cognitive overload in my participant, making it difficult for him to attempt all the questions carefully. The other similar issue that Rashid et al. (2020) researched was how time management methods correlate with academic achievement. She gave an example of how poor time management raises stress and anxiety, which in turn erodes the capacity of students to concentrate and work effectively. Besides, Gobena (2024) discussed how pressure from scholars affects their performance and explained that timelines and other pressures heighten stress levels, adversely affecting academic performance. The research is significant in describing the relationship between anxiety, performance, and time constraints. In the context of Dinesh, the Time boundary negatively impacted his performance and increased his stress level, which restricted him from achieving his expected result.

Effects of Teacher Support and Invigilator Behavior

Discussing the perception of anxiety among my participants, Anxiety and stress among my participants are contributed by the action of invigilators and availability of subject teacher during the English examination. Dinesh and Raj shared their opinion on how their stress related to the English examination was heightened by their negative experience with their invigilators and the absence of their English teacher.

Dinesh's narration reveals the negative result that exam invigilators have on students' levels. He described the actions in which he became more stressed and lost attention when invigilators reacted angrily to the students. Dinesh felt even more

helpless in a threatening environment where such an action occurred. He was impacted by the misconduct of the examiner's behavior in English, which was a subject he was already stressed about for other reasons. This kind of negative interaction can impact performance since it not only signifies the unfavorable examination atmosphere but also increases the stress in students.

Similarly, the impact of the negative test environment was drawn with the interaction of the Raj. He explained about the misconduct of the invigilator when he asked the question in the English exam. He reported that he was already stressed out and trying to understand the question. His invigilator accused him of trying to find the answer in the name of asking a question. He also requested to call his subject teacher, but she declined, saying she could not explain questions during examination time. Raj was already stressed during the English, and this misconduct and negligible behavior of the teacher played a vital role as an extrinsic factor contributing to anxiety, which produced humiliation and feelings the same inside him. He had feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy due to the harsh reaction of the invigilator and the refusal to support the subject teacher.

The incident between Raj and Dinesh demonstrated how the teacher's support and conduction during the examination of the related subject, which is difficult for students, had a great impact on the student's achievements. This can be aligned with the research of Barker and Wright (1955); the absence of a supportive environment during examination time can significantly impact the student's emotional well-being, and it can mitigate anxiety, which can lead to improved performance in the desired subjects. Thus, examination situations like time boundaries and the conduct of the invigilator and English teacher played significant roles in contributing to Dinesh and Raj's anxiety, which had a direct impact on the achievement of their English exam.

English examination anxiety among my participants is influenced by a variety of external pressures and influences, as demonstrated by the complicated picture that contributed from exploring different extrinsic factors resulting in English examination anxiety among my participants. Each participant has the unique experience of facing anxiety created by these factors. Raj's narrative is an important reminder of the detrimental effects of feeling inadequate and nervous due to comparisons to his successful brother. Raj's experience demonstrates how peer pressure and parental expectations may negatively affect a student's mental health and sense of self. Raj

experiences trouble with English assessments, exacerbated by his brother's steadfast standard, demonstrating the critical influence of family dynamics on academic stress.

Ankita's experience shows the impact of comparison in the classroom and teacher's expectations. Ankita's anxiousness heightened in a competitive environment fostered by her English teacher's high expectations that she does better than other students in her English subject. Although the teacher intended to motivate and inspire her, the continual focus on her performance in English and her feeling of lack of preparation created stress and anxiety in her. Her narratives give an example of the impact of how the expectations of outsiders harmed students' mental health and academic achievement.

In the same manner, the competitive environment of the school of Bebisha and her focus on getting public praise for her best performance in English served as the main cause of her anxiety and stress. Thinking always about her grade in English subject and receiving the award in front of all the students caused a lot of stress in Bebisha's mind. Instead of getting motivation and inspiration from the rewards and praise, these factors are contributing to anxiety and stress, too. Her narration shows how the environment full of competition fueled by rewards and praise caused self-doubt and anxiety, which is very harmful to their mental health and academic well-being.

For example, Bebisha's and Sagar's English examination performance was severely destroyed by his anxiety about being judged by his peers. Sagar's examination environment was very stressful due to his negative expectation of receiving a bad evaluation and his worry about being teased by his peers. His narratives shed light on how social factors played an important part in examination anxiety; with stress and tension, how his friend would see him and the possibility of criticizing his stress level increased. Sagar's fight with his friend's critical opinion is a vivid example of how social appreciation, criticism, and comparison impact students' confidence and academic achievements.

Puja's condition of contributing factor anxiety to her in her English exam is related to her parental expectations. She carried a heavy emotional burden as a result of others' inspection, allegations, and the high expectations her parents had set for her. Her whole academic performance was affected as a result of her English examination anxiety, which was increased by her terror of failing the level of these set standards and the criticism that followed. Her story reflects the significant impact that parental

expectations have on a student's anxiety during English examination and emotional well-being.

After examining the experiences of Dinesh, Raj Ankita, Sagar, Bebisha, and Pooja, in short, we know that various external factors like social pressure, comparisons between siblings, English teacher's expectations, greed for incentives, and judgments of peers contribute to English examination anxiety to them. Every participant had a unique experience that picturized a clear picture of how these extrinsic factors were the source of anxiety and stress for the written examination of English.

Intrinsic factors Contributing Anxiety to English exam

After listening to each narrative multiple time among my six participants, it was found that as extrinsic factors, some intrinsic factors were contributing to stress and examination anxiety in English exams to my participants. The internal factors responsible for my participants' fear and stress are the main focus of this discussion. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that inherent stress characteristics of a situation are usually related to the individual's appraisal of the situation and their capabilities, which provokes emotional responses like tension and worry. Spielberger (1972) continues that test anxiety can also hinder exam performance when it is driven by personal worries. This can set up a powerful cycle of cognitive and emotional disruption. Additionally, Sarason (1984) points out that such deeply rooted internal stressors usually have their roots in negative self-concepts and chronic self-doubt that are hard to wane without specific intervention. These internal conditions, which external circumstances did not influence, not only made my participants more anxious about English examinations but also maintained long-standing habits of stress and anxiety.

Exploring the most significant element contributing to my participants' anxiety was their fear of failing an English written exam. This stress frequently results in severe tension and low confidence, closely mixed with their sense of self-worth and academic achievement. According to Zeidner (1998), test anxiety is strongly linked to students' perception of their own abilities, where a fear of failure reinforces low self-confidence and negatively impacts performance. Similarly, Pekrun et al. (2002) argue that academic emotions, such as anxiety, arise from a combination of personal factors and situational triggers, creating a feedback loop that hinders academic success. My participant mostly stated that their worry about receiving low grades in English made

them more anxious than normal, and according to their perspectives, that was the reason for their low academic achievements in English. A good example of how students' fear of failing can control their thoughts and be a responsible reason is Pooja's experience. She revealed that she was unsure what happened to her before and during her English examination, but she felt her preparation was insufficient and was sure she would fail.

Pooja's story reveals that her fear of failing an English exam had a deeper connection to her stress and anxiety. Sagar's experience further shed light on his emotions about the fear of failing as one of the contributing factors to his anxiety in English examinations. He shared his feelings, as he had a belief that he was not doing well this time, too. Spielberger (1972) identifies this kind of emotional response as test anxiety, where the anticipation of failure triggers physical symptoms such as shaking hands and a racing heartbeat. Similarly, Hancock (2001) emphasizes that heightened anxiety levels often correlate with lower performance due to diminished cognitive focus and self-assurance. When he thought about his English exam, a kind of fear arose in him, and due to that, he was sure he would never get his expected result in English. He shared that he was always afraid of his English exam, and when he began to think about it, his hand started shaking, and his heartbeat became faster, which was a sign of his terrible fear. This time, he would also get very low grades in English. In his insights, Sagar narrated a vicious circle of stress and anxiety that led to his lack of self-esteem, low confidence, and self-assurance. His concern over getting a poor result was revealed through bodily symptoms like shaking hands and racing hearts, which further decreased his performance level and his negative impression of English proficiency.

Another important element that played a vital role in contributing to the worry about English examinations in my participants was their low self-esteem. They experienced inadequacy and unpreparedness for their English exam due to the lack of confidence in their abilities to perform in English, whether in grammar or writing. Their stress and worry increased by the fact that their lack of confidence frequently led them to the feeling of low self-worth. Pooja's narratives that she felt she forgot all the answers to whatever she had prepared reflect how her low confidence played an obstacle in her ability to succeed. Although she worked hard to prepare for the English examination, she doubted her ability to perform well in her English examination. This self-doubt rooted in her perceived inadequacy resulted in anxiety

and made her believe that she was not able to achieve a good score in English despite her great effort. Yang et al. (2023) classify that inner conflict, such as fear of failure and low self-esteem, significantly enhances the stress experienced by students, inhibiting their performance ability. Similarly, Dutt et al. (2025) classify that such deeply ingrained anxieties primarily happen through interference in cognition and bodily symptoms and create a chronic cycle of emotional disturbance. This combination of internal fears and external stressors imbues English tests with their unique, difficult experience for students in addition to doubling their other academic underachievement and affective vulnerabilities.

Like Pooja, the significance of Sagar's poor self-esteem in his exam anxiety is further revealed through his deep insights. He mentioned how he repeatedly failed his English exam and that failure made him pessimistic about his upcoming English exam. His destroyed confidence has set the solid foundation for his low self-esteem, which forbade him to think about positive achievements despite hard work. He didn't only feel anxious about the exam, but his worry was also a symptom of his hidden insecurity about failing the English examination and his capability of doing better.

The vicious loop that becomes the consequence of low self-esteem and the stress of failing has a major impact on my participants' anxiety about the English examination. Fear of not achieving an expected result created a loss of confidence, which was later developed into decreased self-esteem and fed back negatively, resulting in increased anxiety levels. The in-depth experiences of Pooja and Sagar, who were the victims of anxiety, self-doubt, and subpar performance, were consistent with this cycle. The narratives of Pooja and Sagar demonstrate how these innate characteristics worked against them. Pooja's feeling of unpreparedness despite hard work later on hid her confidence, and she was afraid of forgetting answers during the examination, which led her to failure. Similarly, Sagar's physical problems related to his English exam stress prevented him from achieving his expected performance. Both of them found it challenging to overcome their anxiety about English examinations because of this vicious cycle of fear and low self-esteem -esteem which was the barrier to their good academic achievement in English exams. In the recent few years, studies have shown how anxiety affects our emotions and can also badly undermine academic performance. Tan and Pang (2023) illustrate that the fear of failure, egged on by success motivation, leads to a vicious cycle. Chronic stress thrives, and mental clarity is sucked away. Yang et al. (2023) confirm that test anxiety

harms performance; the brain drains this causes, together with physical symptoms including trembling hands and pounding heart, of course, makes matters worse yet.

Other intrinsic factors that vitally contributed to anxiety among my participants were self-doubt and performance anxiety. These elements significantly impacted participants' achievements and the views of their chances of being successful since they were based on their ideas about their capabilities and readiness. The lived experiences of Dinesh and Ankita and their self-doubt and performance anxiety created a vicious cycle of stress, worry, and underachievement.

The experience of Ankita and Dinesh both had a repeated problem of self-doubt, which can be defined as a lack of self-trust in one's ability. She felt that her preparation was never enough compared with her classmates, and she developed a chronic sense of self-doubt that caused severe anxiety in her. Her narration revealed that she felt she was always behind her friends in English subjects because, despite preparing well, she had no faith in herself to achieve the desired marks. Her story demonstrated how her feeling of inadequacy compared to others contributed to her self-questioning and her preparedness. She felt more stressed as a result of this compared perspective.

Ankita's insight is a powerful examination of how self-doubt may undermine confidence and increase worry. She kept on thinking that her hard work was insufficient, contributing to her worry. Her statement that the more she tried to improve by practicing grammar or essays, the more she felt that was not enough to get my dream marks portrayed her situation and how she could not believe in herself after doing hard work. This aligns with findings by Maier et al. (2021), who highlight that low self-efficacy exacerbates test anxiety, creating a cycle of negative self-perception and reduced confidence. Likewise, Dinesh experiences mirror Ankita's narratives in many ways, showing how self-doubt can trump even the most careful situation. He mentioned he didn't know why he only considered the English examination. After listening to Dinesh's narration, it is proved that worry is cyclical, and becoming more prepared didn't make him feel less anxious; instead, he was feeling less confident in himself than before. Dundas and Nygård (2024) further emphasize that negative self-evaluation, often linked to test anxiety, can lead to intrusive thoughts and physiological symptoms, which hinder performance. Despite his hard work, Dinesh felt he would forget or misunderstand questions. This is an example of how self-doubt forbade him to meet his expected performance in the English exam.

After listening to the narratives of Ankita and Dinesh, it was found that they were both significantly experiencing performance anxiety, a kind of anxiety connected with the stress of performing poorly in examinations. The feeling of self-doubt and fear of receiving negative feedback caused physical and mental stress that restricted their performance. Ankita vividly remembered her experience with performance anxiety, mentioning she was nervous because she was afraid of failing, and her performance was destroyed afraid of because she was afraid she wouldn't achieve her dream marks. The self-doubt of Ankita led her to focus on her perceived shortcomings rather than her ability, which increased her anxiety in anticipation of doing poorly.

In the same manner, Dinesh's story emphasized how performance anxiety affected his exam experiences. He shared that his stress was increased by his fear of unexpected or forgotten questions, making it difficult to remember his preparation during his English examination. This fear was created by self-doubt and increased his nervousness and awareness, which negatively resulted in his unexpected result on the English exam.

The narration of the participants' exam experiences is greatly influenced by the never-ending process that is created by the interplay between performance anxiety and self-doubt. This cycle in which self-doubt contributed to performance anxiety, which breeds even more doubt on self, as shown by the narratives of Ankita and Dinesh. Ankita experienced self-doubt due to her ongoing difficulties with English syntax and vocabulary. This was made even worse by the truth that although she prepared very hard for her English exam, she could not get her expected results. Her experience illustrated how her thoughts would race with her memorizing capacity and the conviction that no hard work would ever be enough to get her dream marks in the English exam. It was challenging for her to break free from this cycle of self-doubt, anxiety, and uncertainty since it prevented her from effective and adequate performance.

Compared to Ankita, Dinesh expressed a great sense of dissatisfaction and nervousness since he thought his hard work would never be enough to meet the result he expected in the English written examination. Because of his worry about forgetting, misreading, and interpreting exam instructions and questions, he was suffering from performance anxiety that increased his self-doubt and forbade him from performing as expected. His lived experiences were picturized to give an

example of how performance anxiety and self-doubt could descend into a vicious cycle of stress, worry, and low academic performance.

The experiences of these students give significant insights into the contribution of self-doubt and performance anxiety in examination anxiety in English exams. These are the responsible internal factors hidden in personal perspectives and create a vicious cycle of threats and negative experiences that vitally impact their academic outcomes. The cases of Ankita and Dinesh highlight the ruining effect of self-doubt on test anxiety, particularly in English examinations. Ankita's continuous essay and grammar practice was never satisfactory to her, and hence, her confidence vanished, leading to a cycle of fear and worry. Maier et al. (2021) state that such emotional responses are a result of low self-efficacy, which further intensifies test anxiety by creating a negative self-concept. Similarly, Dinesh's experience portrays this vicious circle since he is unclear about why English tests made him nervous more than any other subject. Putwain et al. (2010) detail how subject-specific nervousness will most likely result from cognitive distortions, where pupils exaggerate the perceived areas of weakness. Dinesh, despite thorough practice, became even more nervous and believed that he would misunderstand questions or lose his answers, further consolidating his lack of confidence. These are substantiated by research carried out by Dundas and Nygård (2024), where negative self-judgment has a central role in intensifying intrusive thoughts and somatic symptoms, such as trembling hands and palpitations. These symptoms, as elaborated by Yang et al. (2023), enhance test anxiety, reflecting cognitive and somatic barriers to optimal performance. Together, Ankita and Dinesh's experiences demonstrate how self-doubt, fear of failure, and physical symptoms of anxiety.

Negative Past Experiences: Contributing Factor to Anxiety

For students, the major underlying factor of exam worries and anxiety includes negative pre-experiences with tests. However, if the preceding attempts to take the English exams have gone badly, people will not feel motivated to undertake such strenuous activities again. Expecting repeat mistakes causes present anxiety, decreases self-respect, and increases apprehension for the next English examination. Here, how the previous experiences of Bebisha, Raj, and Sagar affect their current anxiety levels and how these experiences perpetuate a stress cycle that hinders their academic performance is explored after listening to their in-depth insights.

Harsh criticism or failures of past examinations contribute to a negative and never-ending impact on my participants. As in the case of Bebisha, Raj, and Sagar, even if learners are defeated in some tasks, the trauma from this task seems to be one of their burdens in the present. Their accounts show how an experience of disappointing exam performance becomes a vicious cycle, contributing to stress and fear for future exam performances. According to Pekrun et al. (2002), repeated academic failures lead to heightened negative emotions, such as shame and fear, which can severely impair motivation and academic achievement. Bebisha's anxiety around English exams is strongly tied to a traumatic experience from her past. Bebisha's narrative highlights how the stress and trauma from a previous failure have perpetuated her anxiety. In addition to this, Turner and Husman (2008) suggest that this type of academic anxiety may lead to avoidance behaviors, where fear of repeating past mistakes creates a chronic state of tension that undermines concentration. So, it is quite obvious that due to the previous failure at an exam and the concomitant physical illness, she has anticipated further failures in subsequent exams. As a result of this fear of not being able to avoid repeating past mistakes, a chronic condition of tension and anxiety has resulted, impeding her ability to concentrate and perform well in current exams.

In the same manner, Raj also experiences significant anxiety due to previous failures. Raj's experience reveals a similar pattern of anxiety stemming from past performance issues. The pattern of anxiety because of the past performance problem was also visible in Raj's case. When he prepared well before his exam but suddenly blanked out, he feared facing the same problem in each subsequent exam. That constant fear of repeating the same mistake increases his anxiety by creating a vicious cycle where past failures keep on influencing his current experiences at exams. This recurring cycle aligns with Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, which emphasizes how an individual's appraisal of stressful situations influences emotional and behavioral responses. Like Raj and Bebisha, Sagar's anxiety is also rooted in a past failure that continues to haunt his performance. Sagar's account underscores how a previous failure has intensified his anxiety. The physical symptoms of anxiety, shaking hands, and an inability to focus during a past exam have become a recurring issue in subsequent exams.

The experiences of Bebisha, Raj, and Sagar are more intelligible if it is underlined that the earlier failures have been influential factors in the present anxiety

levels. This adverse scenario of failure works as a traumatic component that affects the anxiety of the responding subjects. Each of them could recall specific incidents in which they faced failure, and the memories have branded into their minds the primary psychological obstacles that made them fail in successive examinations. Bebishia remembered her high school days when she faced failure on the mathematics test, which had been a landmark in her life and made her struggle with her exam anxieties. The fear of its repetition became permanent in her head, causing her to doubt her abilities. The pervasiveness of this fear took a toll not only in eroding her confidence but also in pushing up the level of her stress, thereby making it a vicious circle where her anxiety heightens with each subsequent exam. The looming presence of these very failures from the past manages to make the shadow of their presence felt in every present academic pursuit that she engages in.

Raj's case is similar to that of Bebishia in many ways, though his anxiety has its origin in another source. Raj's anxiety began when he was able to fail an English exam in middle school because this subject was always difficult for him; he had never been confident in his ability to speak and write in English. Aside from a failure in this class being a badly needed academic setback, it was more of a vital blow to his already fragile self-esteem and confidence. This further led to the formation of dread that had imbibed Raj's whole academic experience concerning failure in English. Past failures hint continuously at one's inadequacies, adding more anxiety and making it hard to sit for exams with a clear and focused mind. This cycle of anxiety also aligns with Pekrun et al. (2002), who suggest that negative academic experiences foster a persistent emotional burden, impairing cognitive focus and reinforcing fear during subsequent evaluations.

Sagar's case is also a testimony to how past failures at times stick and continue to influence current levels of anxiety. He remembers an extremely traumatic experience in his early schooling years when he failed to present a science project. This failure was not just an academic misstep but was a highly public embarrassment in which he felt humiliated and exposed. Ever since, Sagar has harbored a deep-seated dread of public speaking and presenting that has now grown to become a major anxiety factor in his life, mainly when appearing in exams that involve oral presentations or viva voce. The feeling of not reliving that moment of failure is instilled so hard into his psyche that now it erupts as a massive anxiety when the situation arises. Sagar's experience demonstrates the intense effect of public

humiliation on the development of social anxiety, as Clark and Wells (1995) have illustrated. This negative memory and reduced self-efficacy outlined by Bandura (1977) help to reinforce Sagar's ongoing fear of presenting orally.

Experiences shared by Bebishia, Raj, and Sagar eloquently mirror how past failures continue to have a devastating effect on students' psyche. Failures are traumatic events that leave deep scars, shaping how these individuals approach future challenges. Preparing a snowballing outcome wherein a fear of failing again creates more and more stress, diminishing confidence levels. This, in turn, has a deteriorating impact on their academic performance and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy- the fear of failure results in real failure, strengthening the vicious circle of anxiety.

Their stories also point out the psychological aspect of academic performance. Students' success or failure is not determined only by their cognitive abilities but also by their emotional and psychological state. Their experiences also highlight the psychological component of academic accomplishment. Their emotional and psychological states influence students' success or failure and their cognitive ability. Students' experiences with anxiety-inducing factors include negative past experiences, teacher motivation that turned out to be negative and a source of fear, rewards as a source of anxiety, parents' constant comparison, and participants' low self-esteem. These are some of the new findings that are rarely covered in previous studies about anxiety, its causes, and its effects on academic achievements.

CHAPTER VI

INSIGHTS, REFLECTION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this section, I examine the results from the present study, comparing them to the reviewed literature in seeking patterns, alignments, and discrepancies. We contextualized the experiences and feelings of the participants in the light of relevant theories, with their contributions toward the general understanding of anxiety during exams in English and its nature, manifestations, and casual factors. Results are analyzed for implication; potential limitations are noted, and insight is given as to where exactly such findings may be used. This chapter shows a nexus between raw data and conclusion, giving an interpretation of the findings in detail. In this chapter, we reflect on the broader implications for educational practices and policies that emerge from our findings. We consider how a deeper understanding of exam anxiety in English can positively influence teaching strategies, curriculum development, and student support services.

Anxiety about testing is present among students of all levels in such a way that it seriously influences the performance of the students apart from their psychological well-being. In this study, an attempt was made to understand the anxiety felt by secondary-level students during their English exams, as English was perceived to be a rather complicated yet crucial subject for academic success. The current study employed the IPA approach to investigate the lived experiences of six students to describe the complex interplay among cognitive, psychological, and physical symptoms inherent in test anxiety. By focusing on six students who could give rich narratives, the research study aimed at ascertaining the root cause of anxiety and its effects on performance due to exams, thereby stressing the diversity and often debilitating ways in which anxiety may be manifested.

Key Insights on Examination Anxiety Among Secondary-Level Students

As this study indicates, examination anxiety is a multi-dimensional problem affecting secondary school students in different ways. It manifests itself through physical, psychological, and cognitive means. The data from the intensive interviews of six subjects provides a complete insight into how these many presentations interact with and affect academic performances under high-stakes conditions, such as the

composed English exams. As an individual or personal experience of the researcher, exploring and examining the inner feelings of those students was a complicated action. I should repeatedly believe that my research will help them solve their problem rather than make them feel ashamed in front of others after knowing about their issue.

Physical and Psychological Manifestations of Exam Anxiety

Secondary school learners display examination stress through many physical symptoms, which diminish their academic outcomes. Ankita felt her heart pounding fast, and she developed sweaty palms when performing tests even though she had adequately prepared. The physical reactions to stress displayed differently between Raj and Sagar since Raj developed gas, stomach ache, fever, headaches, and lost focus on exam material. The bodily signs, including sweating, shaking, nausea, dizziness, muscle tension, rapid heart rate, dry mouth, and quivering hands, appear dissimilar from one person to another but persistently create hindrances in attaining good exam scores. The physical indicators described in these accounts show direct connections to anxiety while leading to adverse academic results, which require methods to treat these recognizable symptoms. Exam anxiety occurs repeatedly, especially when students need to take English exams, which creates a complicated situation for this issue. Raj experienced physical sickness as a part of his exam anxiety pattern, which survived through every English test until his senior year. Acute stress affected Sagar so severely that it consistently led to his unsatisfactory test results. Additional targeted intervention approaches need to be developed to address specific anxiety triggers and symptoms during English examinations because this subject poses special difficulty for students who face language challenges and feel a lack of confidence. Examination anxiety occurs frequently, so authorities and teachers should create behavioral strategies to reduce this effect on academic achievement. Self-criticism and fear of failure are also significant contributors to examination anxiety. Pooja's experience illustrates how negative, critical thoughts and inner dialogues can distort a candidate's attention and focus during exams. Her belief that others were watching her failure, coupled with anxious behaviors like biting her pen, demonstrates how anxiety can lower self-confidence over time and lead to underperformance, even with adequate preparation. Similarly, Bebishha's extreme anxiety caused perceptual distortions, making her feel her examination paper was blank despite her preparation. These experiences highlight how academic examination

anxiety interferes with cognition and social adjustment, further compounding students' struggles.

The interplay between cognitive rigidity, mental blockage, and fear of failure further exacerbates exam anxiety. Dinesh and Ankita experienced mental blocks under pressure, making it impossible to recall well-prepared answers. This cognitive inflexibility, heightened by stress, impairs information retrieval and problem-solving abilities. Participants identified an entrenched fear of failure as a major cause of anxiety, associating academic excellence with self-esteem. This fear, combined with low self-esteem, creates a vicious cycle of self-doubt and academic failure. Past failures also perpetuate anxiety, as participants like Bebisha, Raj, and Sagar described how negative exam experiences left lasting emotional scars that impacted their current performance. These traumatic experiences reinforce the fear of repeating mistakes, contributing to ongoing anxiety, diminished confidence, and continued academic struggles in subsequent exams. Addressing these cognitive and emotional factors is crucial for alleviating examination anxiety and improving students' academic outcomes.

My Reflections: Understanding the Ubiquity of Exam Anxiety in English

The analysis of this research demonstrates examination anxiety is both complicated and extensively widespread among students in their secondary grades. This study analyzed six participant narratives to investigate the complex characteristics of exam anxiety, which specifically affects learning English as a complex subject. Emotional, along with cognitive and physical symptoms, generate a deep effect that damages students' academic achievements and their psychological state. Academic outcomes and mental health of students require immediate targeted interventions with supportive strategies to address the multiple forms of exam anxiety.

Understanding the Complexity of Exam Anxiety

My initial assumption upon starting this research investigation showed that I possessed enough understanding of exam anxiety. Most students similar to me have encountered this experience throughout their academic journey. My knowledge about exam anxiety extended only to normal experiences of stress during tests, even though I did not understand how this stress could transform into a powerful force that dominates students' academic lives. Through my research involving six participant experiences, I gained fuller insight into the severe effects exam anxiety produces, especially when students are studying English as their high-stakes subject. English

represents more than an academic subject for most students because they view it as the key that opens doors to their educational progress and professional prospects. Their anxious feelings become sharper because of this belief system, which drives their stress levels to escalate and stay longer.

All participants shared personal stories that highlighted anxiety alongside self-doubt and excessive stress that took full control of their thoughts and bodily functions. The investigations demonstrated that test anxiety represents a profound psychological matter that exceeds one exam or course material. Various physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms develop into a prolonged distressing pattern that students find challenging to overcome.

Addressing Exam Anxiety: A Holistic Approach

Study results have shown me in-depth knowledge of how exam anxiety affects students through physical manifestations, emotional responses and cognitive distractions. The test anxiety narratives from my participants steered my understanding toward recognizing the full extent of the problem, which involves more than just pre-test tension because it shapes students' educational experiences strongly. A complete solution to exam-related anxiety requires educational methods which extend past typical exam preparation methods. School staff needs to recognize how fear of failure and self-esteem levels, as well as former academic experiences, jointly determine student achievement in educational programs. Success in educational development requires teachers to prioritize helping students develop confidence, stress management skills, and resilience capacities. Schools need to establish stress management curricula combined with counseling resources, and they must include mindfulness practices and relaxation techniques to enable students to manage academic challenges.

A crucial element in intervention involves developing growth mindsets with students. Most of the respondents interpreted their academic shortcomings as indicators of their capability deficiencies instead of chances to develop new skills. Educational interventions which normalize student mistakes during learning help students cope with their examination pressures better. Teachers who want to decrease anxiety should alter their assessment systems by incorporating more formative evaluation methods that focus on learning instead of performance results.

The discussion of anxiety within classrooms functions as a method to create understanding about the experience while decreasing its social stigma. Most students

choose to maintain secrecy with their challenges while thinking they are the only ones facing these problems. Through mutual experience sharing, students will feel united against anxiety and discover that their abilities exceed how their anxiety portrays them.

As a researcher, I believe this journey has been transformative. It has challenged my assumptions, deepened my empathy, and reinforced my commitment to understanding the student experience. The process of gathering and analyzing data has also highlighted the importance of qualitative research in uncovering deeply personal and often overlooked issues in education. Moving forward, I hope to explore practical interventions that can help students navigate and overcome exam anxiety. More importantly, I hope to contribute to a broader conversation on creating a supportive learning environment where students feel empowered rather than overwhelmed by academic pressures.

In conclusion, exam anxiety in English learning is a complex, multifaceted issue that demands a compassionate and proactive response from educators, parents, and institutions. By understanding its physical, emotional, and cognitive impacts, we can take meaningful steps to mitigate its effects and create a healthier academic environment. My research has not only provided insights into the experiences of my participants but has also encouraged me to reflect on the broader implications of anxiety in education. The journey does not end here; it is an ongoing process of learning, adapting, and advocating for better support systems to ensure students can thrive academically without being paralyzed by fear.

Resolution: Addressing Exam Anxiety to Enhance Academic Success

The English subject at the secondary level produces multiple forms of test anxiety, which generates significant negative effects on student academic results and emotional health. Through the lived experiences of six participants, this study demonstrates that anxiety during examinations exceeds the fear of unsuccessful outcomes because it incorporates complicated physical symptoms together with mental reactions and emotional distress. According to participant Sagar, various physical responses occur among students, normal symptoms such as clammy hands and fastened heartbeats, as well as severe symptoms consisting of high fever and queasiness along with complete control loss. Physical symptoms of anxiety become worsened because they combine with psychological factors such as self-criticism alongside cognitive traits like fear of failure and rigid thinking patterns that interfere

with exam focus and attention. The regular occurrence of exam anxiety, specifically in English exams, forms an unending cycle of stress and marked performance decline that traps students. The persistent pre-exam nervousness Raj experienced before the English examinations highlight the long-lasting nature of his issue, so organizations should develop specific approaches to tackle complex student challenges.

The research indicates that emotional and cognitive elements are fundamental drivers in developing test-related anxiety. The connection between educational achievement and self-perception established by Pooja and Sagar resulted in serious worry about failure, which became their biggest concern. Sagar experienced shaky hands as well as a racing heartbeat during tests until his inner negativity escalated his symptoms. Between Pooja and her self-criticism, we see the development of educational barriers because of this anxiety that leads to poor academic performance even when homework tasks are completed. Weaker self-esteem caused students to develop a destructive loop where their worries and their declining academic results interacted to boost their anxiety by causing them to doubt their self-confidence and English ability. Clients enter a fatal pattern that emerges from diminishing self-esteem with a rising fear of failure. The mutual relationship between fear of failure and low self-esteem produces an ongoing pattern of academic doubt, which leads to academic failure, according to Pooja and Sagar's experiences. The cycle continues to grow through negative past experiences that both spread anxiety and produce enduring emotional traumas, which negatively impact current performance levels. Past exam difficulties created worries in Bebishia and Sagar, who exhibited recurring performance anxiety that intensified their fear of upcoming examinations.

Implications: From Awareness to Action

This study explores that the manifestation of anxiety varies among each individual with a different nature. As the detrimental impact of test anxiety on academic undertakings becomes more apparent, there is a need to go beyond that level of understanding. As the culture of managing test “stress” or anxiety is slowly embraced by educators and parents alike, identifying the causes and symptoms of test anxiety will assist educationalists, parents, and administrators in finding ways to help students tackle their fears. The findings of this research endeavor can have an important implication for educators, language instructors, and educational policymakers. By uncovering the specific triggers and manifestations of test anxiety in English language learners, interventions and support systems can be developed.

Teachers can implement pedagogical strategies to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that addresses students' anxieties and fosters a sense of confidence and empowerment. Educational institutions can also consider implementing comprehensive mental health support services to provide targeted assistance to those struggling with test anxiety, enabling them to better cope with the challenges of language learning and assessment.

This turning circle of awareness into action helps in performance and creates a conducive environment that makes it easier for students to live a balanced lifestyle both academically and personally. The implications can be discussed in the following points:

Breaking the Silence on Exam Anxiety

The research underscores the importance of teachers and school management in recognizing and addressing exam-related stress among English learners and other subjects. In addition to this, this study may help to understand the core issues affecting students who undergo this challenge. The emotional toll of exam anxiety underlines the importance of accessible support systems, including counseling and stress management workshops, to help students manage their emotions and break the cycle of stress. If the students feel free to express their anxiety before and during their examination and know they are not alone in tackling these hurdles, they may have more confidence and less panic.

Rethinking Exam Preparation Strategies

Traditional study techniques may not be sufficient for students facing anxiety. Developing alternative methods that focus on managing stress—such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and time management—can be crucial in helping students perform better. The methods of taking examinations should be changed, and the classroom invigilator should maintain a friendly environment for the students where, instead of being panicked, they feel comfortable while taking an examination.

Customized Learning Approaches for At-Risk Students

Given that anxiety impacts students differently, personalized learning plans that account for emotional well-being, not just academic preparation, may help students like Pooja and Sagar, who struggle with self-esteem and fear of failure. There's a growing need to integrate mental health education into school curricula. Teaching students how to manage anxiety and providing tools for resilience could significantly reduce exam-related stress and improve academic outcomes. Training

and awareness are needed not only for the students but also for educators and parents. So, none of the students can be victimized in the name of motivation and to fulfill the parental expectation.

Understanding the Role of Cognitive Breakdowns

The study reveals how anxiety can lead to cognitive blocks, where students experience mental shutdowns during exams. This finding suggests that teachers should explore alternate assessment methods to minimize high-pressure environments, which will be useful for students prone to examination anxiety.

Addressing the Long-Term Impact of Negative Exam Experiences

Repeated failures, like those experienced by Bebisha and Raj, have long-term psychological consequences. Targeted interventions to help students are recommended to recover from negative experiences and regain confidence.

Reframing Success and Failure for Students

Fear of failure is a key contributor to exam anxiety, as shown in the study. Schools need to redefine success, emphasizing learning and improvement rather than only focusing on grades to help reduce fear-based anxiety. While rewarding successful students, schools shouldn't forget to motivate and inspire those who repeatedly get low grades in English.

Promoting Peer Support and Collaborative Learning

Students often feel isolated in their struggles with exam anxiety. Creating a culture of peer support, where students can share experiences and strategies, can help alleviate feelings of isolation and build resilience.

The Need for Continuous Research and Monitoring

Given the ongoing and evolving nature of exam anxiety, more research and regular monitoring of students' mental health can help educational institutions adapt their strategies to provide better support for those most at risk.

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