Investigating the Reasons Behind EFL Students' Mental Blocks During Examinations

The Case of First-Year Students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University

A Dissertation

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Declaration

We declare that this dissertation, titled “Invastigating the Reasons Behind EFL Students' Mental Blocks During Examinations ”, is our original work. It was completed under the guidance of our supervisor, Dr. Douadi , and has not been previously submitted to any other institution or university. We also acknowledge that all sources used in this study are properly referenced and certify that this dissertation follows the guidelines of American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition style guide. This study was conducted at the Department of English, Mohammed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University, Bordj Bou Arreridj, Algeria.

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Boutaghane Aicha , Mekhalfia Ikram

Dedication 1

﴿وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ﴾

To the heroes of my story :my mother, thank you for being the lighthouse in my life.

Your unwavering strength and compassion have shaped the person I am today.

To my father, who spent the prime of his youth for my life and learning to you, my support in this life, to you who planted within me an ambition that now pushes me forward toward a successful future.

To my beloved brothers, Adem, Oussama, and Abdeljalil your love and presence have always been my quiet strength.

To those who encouraged me in my weakness and stood by me in my fear.

To the successful and brilliant lady with whom I share the same purpose Aicha, your light has been a source of inspiration and strength.

This journey was never mine alone it was built on love, sacrifice, and the prayers of those who believed in me before I believed in myself.

IKRAM

Dedication 2

﴿ وآخر دعواهم ان الحمد لله ربي العالمين﴾

To the one who embraced me with her heart before her hands, and with her soul before her eyes. To the one who supported me with her care, becoming a safe refuge, a guardian angel, and with her prayers, a healing balm and a sufficient remedy. To you, my mother

To my dear father, You gave your best years to support me and build my future. Your sacrifices, your wisdom, and your love have guided me every step of the way. I owe so much of who I am to you.

To my grandfather ,You were the one who comforted me in silence, who wiped my tears and made me feel seen and loved. Even though you're gone, your memory lives on in my heart. May you rest in peace.

To my dear grandmother,You have always believed in me. Your prayers lifted me, and your love gave me hope. You are my second mother and one of my biggest blessings.

To all those who believe in me thank you so much

To my sisters and brothers,Thank you for being there in my hardest moments. Your love, your laughter, and your support filled the empty spaces in my life and gave me strength to keep going.

To my dearest friend Ikram who stood by my side in times of exhaustion and supported me until the very end .

AICHA

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We extend heartfelt appreciation to all the participants in our study, whose willingness and honesty made this research possible.

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List of Acronyms :

BBA : Bordj Bou Arreridj

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

APA : American Psychological Association

ACT : Attentional Control Theory

RI : Retroactive Interference

GPA : Grade Point Average

SPSS : Statistical Package for the Social Siences

Table of Content

Abstract

Given the cognitive and emotional demands of language learning, EFL students often experience mental blocks during examinations, which hinder their ability to recall information and perform effectively. Identifying the underlying causes of these mental blocks is essential for enhancing students' academic outcomes and psychological well-being. This study aims to investigate the exam-related difficulties faced by first-year EFL licence students at Mohammed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University using a quantitative descriptive research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and responses were obtained from 82 students. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to quantify patterns and thematic Analysis to summarize open-ended responses. The results revealed several contributing factors to mental blocks during exams, including test anxiety, fear of failure, poor preparation, limited language proficiency, and external pressure from teachers or family. Additional issues such as low self-confidence, weak time management, and poor exam organization were also found to significantly affect students' performance. The study highlights the importance of fostering supportive assessment practices, improving study habits, and addressing emotional challenges in the EFL learning environment. These findings provide valuable insights into the academic challenges faced by Algerian EFL students and offer pedagogical recommendations for minimizing mental blocks during examinations.

Keywords **:** mental blocks, exam anxiety, EFLstudents, mixed-methods , language

General Introduction

The psychological and cognitive challenges that students face during exams have long been the focus of academic research, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Raschka et al., 2009). Among these challenges, mental blocks sudden disruptions in the ability to retrieve or process learned information are a major concern for academic performance . Mental blocks are more than just forgetfulness; they are frequently caused by complex interconnections of linguistic anxiety, self-perception, test pressure, and insufficient coping mechanisms (Dörnyei, 2005; Scovel, 1991; Young, 1999).

In EFL environments, particularly where English is taught as a required academic subject, students frequently experience mental blocks during oral or written tests, limiting their capacity to demonstrate actual language competencies (Liu, 2006; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Researchers have investigated a variety of causes that contribute to this phenomenon, including language competency, exam preparation strategies, classroom dynamics, and socio-cultural expectations. However, despite increased interest in affective elements in language learning, mental blocks during exams is still understudied in several EFL situations.

In Algerian higher education, where English is becoming increasingly important in academic programs, EFL students frequently face high-stakes tests that can cause severe stress and anxiety. However, little empirical research has been undertaken to determine the particular reasons for these mental barriers from the students' perspectives. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the fundamental causes of EFL students' mental blocks during exams, with a focus on their psychological, academic, and environmental experiences. By analyzing both the perceived causes and the coping strategies students employ, the study intends to provide insights that could enhance teaching practices and evaluation procedures in Algerian institutions and similar EFL contexts .

Statement of the Problem

Mental blocks during exams are frequently observed among EFL students, often resulting in poor performance and a loss of confidence. Although previous studies have generally focused on exam anxiety as the primary cause, this perspective may be overly narrow. In reality, mental blocks can result from a variety of psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and contextual issues that hinder students' ablity to think effectively during exams. While studies in other contexts have investigated test-related anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Zeidner, 1998), there is still a lack of research into the broader causes of mental blocks during examinations, particularly in Algerian academic settings. At Mohammad El Bachir El Ibrahimi, many first-year EFL students struggle with mental blocks, but little is known about what triggers these experiences from their perspective. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the underlying reasons behind mental blocks among first-year EFL students during examinations, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the issue and to offer practical insights for teaching and assessment.

Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the underlying causes of mental blocks during examinations among first-year EFL students at Mohammad El Bachir El Ibrahimi University. To achieve this aim, the following specific objectives have been established:

1. To explore students' perceptions of the factors that contribute to mental blocks during EFL examinations.
2. To identify the psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and contextual elements that may influence students' ability to perform effectively during tests.
3. To examine students' suggestions on how to reduce or overcome mental blocks in future examination settings.

Research Questions

After identifying the issue that this study seeks to address, the research questions are framed as follows:

1. What are students' perceptions regarding the factors that contribute to mental blocks during EFL examinations?
2. What psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors do students identify as influencing their performance during exams?
3. What suggestions do students offer to help prevent or overcome mental blocks during EFL examinations?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by EFL students during examinations. While previous studies have generally focused on test anxiety as the primary cause of poor performance, this study addresses a critical gap by investigating a broader range of psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors that may contribute to mental blocks. Specifically, in Algeria, and particularly at Mohammad El Bachir El Ibrahimi University, there is a lack of empirical research that examines these issues from the students' perspectives. This study provides valuable insights into how first-year EFL students perceive and experience mental blocks during exams.

Research Methodology

This study is guided by the positivist research paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and the use of empirical data. It adopts a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate the causes of mental blocks during examinations among first-year EFL students. The purpose is to describe and analyze patterns and trends related to students' experiences without manipulating any variables. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of first-year English Licence (Bachelor's) students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University. The questionnaire primarily consists of closed-ended questions, allowing for statistical analysis and generalizations about the population. Random sampling was employed to ensure a representative selection of participants.

This methodological approach was chosen to obtain measurable, objective data that can describe the psychological, cognitive, linguistic, and environmental factors contributing to students' mental blocks during exams.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into three main chapters. It begins with a general introduction, which presents the background of the study, the research problem, research aim and objectives, research questions, significance of the study, research methodology, and the structure of the dissertation itself.

Chapter One is the literature review, which is divided into three main sections. The first section provides definitions of examinations and outlines their types, including oral and written examinations. The second section defines the concept of mental blocks, explores its theoretical foundations, and highlights psychological theories related to exam stress and cognitive difficulties. This includes the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the Interference Theory of Forgetting, Attentional Control Theory, and the Theory of Learned Helplessness. The third

section focuses on the main reasons behind mental blocks during examinations. It covers psychological factors such as test anxiety, self-doubt, fear of evaluation, and depression; cognitive and linguistic difficulties such as poor writing skills, intrusive thoughts, surface learning, and cognitive overload; as well as environmental and external stressors like exam pressure, time limits, and social expectations. This chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature, especially in the Algerian university context.

Chapter Two addresses the practical part of the study. It explains the research methodology, including the research paradigm, research design, data collection tool, sampling technique, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis. It also discusses the steps taken to ensure research quality and maintain ethical standards.

Chapter Three presents the findings and results obtained from the student questionnaire. This chapter includes a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data in relation to the research questions and objectives. The dissertation concludes with a summary of the key findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research and classroom practice.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Examinations have long been a fundamental component of academic assessment, serving as a means to evaluate students' knowledge, skills, and performance under structured conditions. However, while examinations are intended to measure academic achievement, many students experience mental blocks that hinder their ability to perform effectively. Mental blocks during examinations manifest as sudden cognitive barriers that prevent students from recalling information, organising their thoughts, or expressing their knowledge adequately.

The phenomenon of mental blocks has garnered significant attention in educational research, as it is often linked to psychological, cognitive, and environmental factors. Anxiety, self-doubt, cognitive overload, and external stressors all contribute to students' struggles in examination settings. Understanding these underlying causes is crucial for educators, policymakers, and students themselves, as it can lead to the development of strategies to minimise their impact and enhance academic performance.

This chapter explores the key concepts related to mental blocks in examinations. It begins by defining examinations and their various types, providing an overview of their role in educational systems. It then delves into the concept of mental blocks, examining their definitions, theoretical foundations, and psychological implications. Furthermore, it analyses the primary reasons behind mental blocks during examinations, including test anxiety, cognitive difficulties, and environmental stressors. By synthesising relevant literature, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to mental blocks and their impact on students' academic performance.

Definition of Examinations

Examinations have long been a cornerstone of educational assessment, widely recognized as formal tests that measure what students know and how they perform under prescribed conditions. Traditionally, examinations are seen as structured assessments whether written,

oral, or practical that evaluate academic abilities and achievements. Early definitions highlight that examinations are intended to gauge not only a student's knowledge of a subject but also their ability to perform within a standardized framework (Mathews, 1985; Ahmed, 1993; Iqbal, 1996; Dictionary of Education, 1998). This literature review synthesizes traditional definitions and critical perspectives on examinations, aiming to reveal both their value and limitations in assessing student performance.

Examinations are defined as formal tests designed to measure student competence. Mathews (1985) asserts that examinations serve as a means to evaluate educational effectiveness by distinguishing what students can accomplish from what they merely know. Ahmed (1993) expands on this idea by emphasizing the structured nature of examinations, noting that they enable educators to assess performance through grades and rankings. Iqbal (1996) similarly describes the examination process as a systematic method to ensure that students meet predetermined academic standards. The Dictionary of Education (1998) further supports this view by defining examinations as assessments that require students to answer questions or complete specific tasks by measuring proficiency in a given subject area.

While traditional definitions underscore the organizational benefits of examinations, a critical body of literature challenges their efficacy and fairness. Ahmad (2001) and Qureshi (1996) acknowledge the role of examinations in improving educational quality yet caution that such assessments may overlook key limitations. Zeidner (1995) introduces the notion that examinations profoundly influence students' academic and professional trajectories by affecting their confidence and stress levels. This observation is bolstered by psychological research from Carver and Scheier (1994) and Folkman and Lazarus (1985), which highlights that high-stakes testing can trigger significant anxiety and negatively impact performance.

Types of Examinations

Oral Examination

An oral examination is a form of assessment where a student or candidate responds verbally to questions or prompts from one or more examiners. Instead of writing answers on paper , the person demonstrates their knowledge through spoken responses. These examinations can assess different skills than written tests, including verbal communication abilities, quick thinking, and how well someone can explain complex concepts. They may be structured (with predetermined questions) or semi-structured (allowing for conversation flow).

One of the primary advantages of oral exams is their ability to develop oral communication skills, which are essential for students in scientific disciplines (ASA Undergraduate Guidelines Workgroup, 2014). Unlike written assessments, oral exams require students to articulate their reasoning clearly, fostering skills that are valuable in professional and academic settings.Another key benefit is the authenticity of oral exams. Students are more likely to encounter situations where they must defend their reasoning rather than take written tests in their future careers (Goodman, 2020, p. 3441). This format allows for more interactive and dynamic assessment, helping instructors assess not only what students know but how they think. Additionally, oral exams serve as a powerful tool for identifying misconceptions. Since students must verbalize their thought processes, educators can engage in meaningful discussions to address misunderstandings and refine students' conceptual knowledge (Goodman, 2020, p. 3441). Furthermore, oral exams are resistant to plagiarism, as students cannot rely on memorized answers or external assistance; they must demonstrate genuine understanding in their own words (Goodman, 2020, p. 3441).

Written Examination

Written tests are a popular evaluation method in educational settings because they provide a number of benefits. Their capacity to assess a wide range of knowledge in an organized and standardized way is one of their main advantages. In contrast to oral evaluations, written tests give students the chance to meticulously arrange their ideas, formulate logical arguments, and exhibit their comprehension of difficult subjects in a thorough and thoughtful way (Brown, 2018).

The impartiality and dependability of written exams are two other important benefits. Because replies are recorded, they make it easier to compare pupils and provide uniform grading, which lowers the possibility of assessment bias (Smith & Jones, 2021, p. 215). This guarantees that every student is assessed using the same standards, making written tests an impartial and open form of evaluation.

Additionally, by requiring students to analyze, synthesize, and apply their knowledge in writing, written exams help students develop critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills which are important for both academic and professional success (Miller, 2019, p. 87). Written exams also help students develop critical writing skills, which are useful in a variety of disciplines, especially in academic and professional communication (Johnson, 2020, p. 132).

Definition of Mental Block

Mental blocks refer to cognitive barriers that hinder individuals from retrieving or processing information effectively, particularly in high-pressure situations. Roediger and Neely (1982) describe retrieval blocks as instances where information remains temporarily inaccessible due to interference from related concepts, a phenomenon that may explain why students struggle to recall knowledge during examinations. Similarly, Kozak et al. (2008) define mental blocks as cognitive barriers arising from thought suppression, where attempts to ignore

distracting thoughts can paradoxically make them more persistent, leading to retrieval failure. Expanding on this, Pattinson and Cotterill (2017) characterise mental blocks as psychological barriers that obstruct individuals from performing learned tasks. In academic settings, these barriers manifest when test anxiety, cognitive overload, and low self-confidence prevent students from recalling information. Andriyenko (2022) further conceptualises mental blocks as internal psychological barriers that impede self-development, noting that in educational contexts, they can obstruct cognitive processes, making information retrieval difficult during exams. Drawing on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, Pattinson and Cotterill (2017) argue that individuals with higher self-efficacy are less prone to mental blocks, suggesting that boosting students' confidence in their academic abilities could mitigate exam-related retrieval difficulties.

Theories Related to Mental Block

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Mental blocks during examinations are a common phenomenon that affect students' performance, often leading to increased anxiety, decreased confidence, and hindered recall of previously learned material. Various factors contribute to this issue, including affective factors such as stress, lack of motivation, and negative self-perception. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis provides a theoretical framework for understanding how emotions impact learning and performance. Krashen's (1980) Affective Filter Hypothesis emphasizes how anxiety, confidence, and drive affect language learning. Krashen claims that a strong affective filter, which is brought on by negative emotions, might prevent language input from being processed efficiently, making it harder to understand and recall information. This idea is pertinent to students who encounter mental blocks during exams since their capacity to remember and apply information under pressure can be hampered by elevated anxiety and low self-esteem. Chen's (2020) research takes this concept a step further by examining the part affective factors play in

learning English grammar. According to Chen, pupils who experience severe worry may be unable to learn and remember grammar rules since it filters out understandable information. The mental block that occurs during exams, when anxiety and tension impair students' capacity to recall and apply information, is reflected in this phenomena.The Affective Filter Hypothesis was developed by Krashen after Dulay and Burt (1977) originally proposed the notion that emotions are important in second language acquisition. According to studies on exam anxiety, pupils who experience high levels of anxiety have trouble processing information and retrieving memories (Ellis, 1974).

The Interference Theory of Forgetting

This theory describes how previously learned knowledge can interfere with the memory of newly learned material (proactive interference), as well as how new knowledge can interfere with old information recall (retroactive interference). During exams, students may struggle to recall the correct knowledge because their memory is interrupted by similar or competing information, resulting in mental blocks. The Interference Theory of Forgetting proposes that new information interferes with the recall of previously learnt content. Retroactive interference (RI) occurs when subsequent events disturb memory consolidation (Marcus Vinicius Costa Alves and O. Bueno, 2017). Tomlinson et al. (2009) rejected the inhibition-based explanation for cue-independent forgetting in favor of an interference account based on a two-stage recall model. Mercer (2015) found that a brief wakeful rest following learning can reduce RI-based forgetting by delaying interference. However, Portrat et al. (2008) showed evidence for time-related deterioration in working memory, demonstrating that greater processing time leads to poorer recall even when the time available for memory trace refreshing is constant. These data indicate that both interference and time-related degradation may contribute to forgetfulness, with their relative importance potentially .

Attentional Control Theory (ACT)

Attentional Control Theory (ACT), anxiety decreases cognitive function by interfering with executive processes and attentional control. Research supports up ACT's predictions, demonstrating that trait anxiety is linked to decreased performance efficiency under high perceptual loads (Sadeh & Bredemeier, 2011) and decreased proactive control in the presence of emotional distractors (Kalanthroff et al., 2016). These effects do not just affect adults; youngsters with anxiety and depression symptoms have poorer attentional control for both emotional and non-emotional stimuli (Waszczuk et al., 2015). Neuroimaging studies have linked ACT to specific brain networks, such as the frontoparietal and cingular-opercula networks (Eysenck et al., 2022). The theory's implications extend beyond cognitive performance and could guide neurocognitive treatment for anxiety (Eysenck et al., 2022).

The Theory of Learned Helplessness

According to the hypothesis of learned helplessness, people who suffer repeated failures may develop the belief that their actions have no effect on outcomes, resulting in disinterest and poor performance. This tendency has been found in a variety of settings, including academic tests and sports. Diener and Dweck (1980) discovered that "helpless" youngsters underestimate their accomplishments and see defeat as insurmountable. Fazili and Singh (2024) proved in educational contexts that challenging early test questions can lead to learned helplessness, reducing total test performance. Maier and Seligman (2016) amended the original idea, stating that inactivity is an unlearned default response to long-term painful events mediated by the dorsal raphe nuclei. In sports, Sankaran (2023) proposes that learned helplessness might result from repeated failed experiences.

Reasons of Mental block during Examinations

Psychologial Factor

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is one of the most major psychological barriers that students confront while taking exams. This type of anxiety produces a variety of physiological, emotional, and cognitive responses that might impair academic performance. When students are very concerned about their performance, they frequently fail to recall knowledge and explain their responses properly. According to research, fear of failure can cause mental barriers, making it difficult for students to retain crucial topics and confidently react to exam questions (Rezazadeh and Tavakoli, 2009). These problems underline the importance of effective ways for students to manage anxiety and develop resilience in high-pressure academic contexts.

Test anxiety, a form of performance anxiety, arises when individuals face evaluative situations, particularly examinations, where they perceive significant pressure to perform well (Mashayekh & Hashemi, 2011). It's more than just normal stress; it’s a complex state involving cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses to the fear of failure (Jaradat, 2013; Mowbray, 2012; Saha, 2014). Essentially, test anxiety represents a heightened apprehension regarding potential negative outcomes in academic assessments (Saha, 2014). The impact of test anxiety is profound, primarily affecting cognitive functioning. Mashayekh and Hashemi (2011), along with Glass et al. (2001), demonstrate that test anxiety reduces working memory capacity and impairs reasoning abilities. This cognitive interference leads to retrieval failures, where students experience a "mind blank" and are unable to recall previously learned information (Hendricks, 2022; Mowbray, 2012). This phenomenon, known as "retrieval failure anxiety" or "anxiety blockage" (Mowbray, 2012), occurs because cognitive resources are diverted from task-relevant processing to worry and task-irrelevant thoughts, as highlighted by Saha (2014). Consequently, students with high test anxiety exhibit diminished information processing capacity and struggle with higher order thinking, resulting in poorer academic performance (Saha, 2014).Test anxiety is not a singular entity but a multidimensional construct

encompassing cognitive (worry), emotional (feeling of dread), physiological (increased heart rate), and behavioral (avoidance) components (Jaradat, 2013; Mowbray, 2012). Building on this, Liebert and Morris (1967), as cited in Saha (2014), conceptualized test anxiety as comprising two primary elements: worry and emotionality. Worry represents the cognitive aspects, such as preoccupations and concerns, while emotionality reflects the awareness of bodily arousal and tension. Attentional control theory, as discussed by Mowbray (2012), further explains that worry related cognitions are particularly activated in stressful situations, interfering with cognitive processes and disrupting task-directed attention during examinations. This interference leads to retrieval failures and diminished performance. Furthermore, Stöber and Pekrun (2004) emphasize that test anxiety is closely linked to related constructs such as fear of failure, examination stress, and performance anxiety, highlighting its complex and multifaceted nature. Together these author explain that the cognitive side of anxiety (worry) and the physical side of anxiety (emotionality) work together to create a mental block.

In summary, test anxiety is a multifaceted form of performance anxiety that significantly impairs cognitive functioning and academic performance. It involves a range of cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses, with worry and emotionality playing key roles. The diversion of cognitive resources to worry and task-irrelevant thoughts leads to retrieval failures and diminished academic outcomes.

Self Doubt and Low Confidence

Self-doubt and low confidence are key psychological barries that prevent pupils from performing well on exams. When students lack confidence in their talents, they frequently fail to convey their thoughts properly, resulting in hesitation and doubt. This issue is most evident in written exams, as students with inadequate writing skills may feel overwhelmed by the task at hand. Self-doubt combined with writing challenges can cause anxiety and confusion, making it difficult for pupils to organize their thoughts and respond effectively (Brahmi & Touil, 2022).

These issues underscore the need of building confidence in students through effective writing teaching and supportive learning environments, allowing them to develop the skills and self-assurance required to perform effectively under exam conditions.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Another important aspect contributing to students fear of exams is their anxiety of being evaluated negatively. Many students are concerned about receiving poor grades or critical feedback from teachers, which causes stress and impairs their ability to perform efficiently. This increased anxiety can interfere with cognitive processes, making it harder for children to organize their ideas and provide structured responses. According to research, fear might cause mental barriers, aggravating exam performance difficulties (Brahmi & Touil, 2022). Addressing this issue necessitates creating a more supportive academic environment that emphasizes positive feedback, allowing students to develop resilience and confidence in their talents.

Depressions and Academic Performance

Depression can negatively effect kids' academic performance, in addition to anxiety. According to research, students who are diagnosed with depression frequently have cognitive impairments, such as memory loss and difficulty concentrating. These difficulties closely correlate with lower academic performance, with one study finding a 0.49-point drop in GPA among students suffering from depression (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). The inability to focus and connect with exam content successfully puts students with depression at a major disadvantage, increasing their academic challenges.

Self-Efficacy

A common problem for students is mental block during exams, which is defined by an abrupt inability to remember details or think effectively under pressure. Test anxiety, insecurity, and

cognitive strain are frequently associated with this syndrome. Self-efficacy, or a person's confidence in their capacity to complete particular activities, is pivotal to academic success, according to Bandura (1982). While students with low self-efficacy may give in to stress and exhibit avoidance behaviors and cognitive freeze during tests, individuals with strong self-efficacy participate in difficult tasks more persistently. The impact of self-efficacy on mental blocks during exams is examined in this literature review, along with instructional strategies that can lessen these effects. According to Bandura (1981, 1982), students' task motivation, effort expenditure, and persistence are all greatly impacted by their sense of self-efficacy. Students who have a strong sense of their own abilities are more likely to maintain composure, apply efficient problem-solving techniques, and persevere through challenging questions on a test. On the other hand, students who have poor self-efficacy may suffer from mental blocks, elevated stress reactions, and exam anxiety, which can affect their cognitive abilities. When students think they are incapable of succeeding or feel overwhelmed by the exam environment, mental barriers emerge. Cognitive interference, in which worry interferes with the recall of previously learned knowledge, has been linked to low self-efficacy, according to research (Schunk, 1981). Promoting a strong feeling of self-efficacy is therefore essential to avoiding mental barriers linked to exams.

Cognitive and Linguistics Defficuties

Language and Writing Challenges

Cognitive and linguistic difficulties have a substantial impact on students exam performance. Struggling with syntax, vocabulary, and sentence structure causes cognitive overload, which increases tension and makes it difficult to organize thoughts (Brahmi & Touil, 2022). These problems might exacerbate test anxiety, particularly among students taking tests in a second language. The urge to use precise language diverts attention away from critical thinking, which further affects performance. To overcome this, teachers should incorporate

linguistic instructions, structured writing instruction, and controlled practice to help students convey their thoughts more clearly and confidently .

Mental Interference and Intrusive Thoughts

In addition to linguistic difficulties, test anxiety can substantially interrupt cognitive processes via intrusive thoughts and mental interference. Students with high levels of anxiety are frequently focused with thoughts of failure, time pressure, and self-doubt. These negative ideas eliminate crucial cognitive resources that should be used for problem solving and knowledge retrieval. As a result, students may struggle to concentrate, arrange their responses, and recall previously learned material efficiently. This loop of anxiety and cognitive interference not only impairs student performance but also promotes their fear of tests, resulting in long-term academic difficulties (Ringeisen and Buchwald, 2010)

Overwhelming Anxiety and Memory Disruptions

Overwhelming anxiety can make it difficult for students to remember material and organize their answers on tests. Mental blockages that hinder performance result from the diversion of cognitive resources from efficient recollection and problem-solving when stress becomes a lot to handle. As a result, students may fail to exhibit their actual knowledge and skills, not due to a lack of understanding, but because worry hinders their capacity to access and convey what they have learned (Liu & Chen, 2015).

Academic Writing and Cognitive Overload

Students who are unfamiliar with academic writing traditions sometimes struggle to properly articulate their thoughts, especially in high-stakes test contexts. Without adequate exposure to good writing approaches, individuals may struggle to structure arguments, use acceptable vocabulary, and adhere to professional writing standards. This uncertainty contributes to increased stress since students feel unprepared to satisfy academic objectives

within time limits. As a result, the pressure to create well-organized and grammatically correct solutions might cause cognitive overload, affecting their capacity to express their information properly (Cheng, 2004)

Surface Learning Approaches and Mental Blocks

The way pupils approach learning also influences their capacity to perform well on exams. Those who rely mainly on rote memorization rather than deep understanding frequently struggle to recall material when confronted with complicated or analytical problems. Surface learning, which focuses on memorizing information rather than understanding underlying concepts, reduces pupils' capacity to apply knowledge successfully. These pupils are more prone to face mental blocks during tests because they are unable to access memorized data in a meaningful way. Deeper learning tools, such as critical thinking exercises and application-based study techniques, can improve students' retention and recall of material, minimizing mental barriers (Verešová & Foglová, 2018).

Cognitive Overload

When the cognitive demands of a task overwhelm a learner's working memory, cognitive overload develops, impairing their capacity to efficiently process and retain knowledge. When students must concurrently interact with several forms of content, including text, graphics, and audio, this problem is especially prevalent in multimedia learning settings (Paas, Ayres, & Pachman, 2008). When learners are forced to integrate fragmented information, poorly designed instructional materials can exacerbate this problem by increasing cognitive strain and decreasing understanding (Paas et al., 2008). Cognitive load theory divides cognitive processing into three categories: relevant, extraneous, and intrinsic load (Paas & Van Merriënboer, 1994). The intricacy of the subject matter being studied and the learner's past knowledge have an impact on intrinsic load. Ineffective instructional design, on the other hand,

results in extraneous load, which makes pupils put in needless mental work without improving comprehension. The cognitive work required for effective learning, such Teachers should strive to balance intrinsic and relevant load while minimizing extraneous load in order to support effective learning (Paas & Van Merriënboer, 1994).To lesscognitive overload, instructional designers must maximize the presentation of the materials and eliminate unnecessary cognitive demands (Sweller, 2005). One major issue that needs to be addressed is the redundancy effect, which occurs when the same information is presented in various formats and compels students to process unnecessary repetitions. Effective teaching strategies should also prevent split attention by reducing the need for students to integrate content independently by presenting related material at the same time (Sweller, 2005).

Enviromental and External Stressors

Exam Enviroment and Distractions

Exam environment can have a major effect on students' stress levels, with factors such as background noise, exact time constraints, and the presence of an invigilator causing anxiety. These situations increase pressure on pupils, making it more difficult for them to focus and increasing the chance of mental blocks that hinder their performance (Brahmi & Touil, 2022).

Parental and Social Pressure

Students may experience severe stress due to the high standards established by parents, educators, and society at large, which may result in exam anxiety. Their ability to properly organize their thoughts and recall knowledge is frequently disrupted by the pressure to do well, which eventually affects their academic performance (Farhan & Khan, 2015).

Strict Time Constraints and Congnitive Overload

Strict exam conditions, particularly strict time limits, can greatly increase students' stress levels, making it harder for them to organize their thoughts and answer appropriately. When students are under time constraints, they may experience cognitive overload, which can make it difficult to recall crucial concepts or structure their responses coherently. This increased worry can produce mental barriers, resulting in errors or even the incapacity to accomplish activities efficiently (Saha, 2014). The impact of strict time constraints emphasizes the need of creating exam conditions that balance academic rigor with measures that assist students in managing stress and performing to their maximum capacity.

Exam Format and Unexpected Questions

When students are unfamiliar with the structure or types of questions on an exam, they are more likely to feel anxious. Unexpected question styles can cause panic, making it difficult for students to think clearly, arrange their responses, and successfully demonstrate their knowledge (Saha, 2014).

Sleep Deprivation and Cognitive Performance

Sleep deprivation and cognitive performance Inadequate sleep is another big contributor to mental barriers during exams. Students who do not get enough sleep frequently struggle with memory consolidation, problem solving, and overall cognitive performance. Sleep deprivation reduces the brain's ability to process and retain information, making it more difficult for students to recall critical concepts during tests. Fatigue can also weaken concentration and increase stress levels, hurting academic performance. As a result, students who give up sleep for late-night study sessions may struggle to recall knowledge under pressure, resulting in mental blocks and lower exam performance (Ruiz-Pérez, Gómez-Ruano, & Navia-Manzano, 2016).

Study Habit and Prepration Strategies

Lack of writing Practice and Exam Readiness

Effective exam performance is highly related to students' study habits and preparation strategies. A lack of frequent writing practice in the classroom might make pupils feel unprepared for tests, causing hesitation and confusion. Without regular opportunities to improve their writing skills, students may struggle to structure their responses properly under time constraints, increasing the likelihood of mental blocks (Brahmi & Touil, 2022).

Poor Study Habit and Cramming

In addition to limited writing practice, insufficient study practices add to exam-related stress. Many students rely on last-minute memorizing rather than planned, long-term planning. This strategy frequently causes cognitive overload, making it difficult to recall and arrange knowledge effectively before exams. Poor time management and ineffective revision approaches cause stress, limiting students' capacity to perform well under pressure (Brahmi & Touil, 2022). Recognizing the impact of inadequate preparation emphasizes the necessity of developing strong study habits, structured writing practice, and time management skills to boost students' confidence and academic achievement.

Conclusion

This chapter established the theoretical and conceptual framework for the current study by investigating key constructs connected to EFL students' mental barriers during exams. It started by discussing the definition and types of examinations, emphasizing their importance in academic evaluation. The chapter then delves into the concept of mental blocks, delving into the different psychological, cognitive, and environmental factors that interfere with students' test performance. Several psychological theories, including Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, the Interference Theory of Forgetting, Attentional Control Theory, and the Theory

of Learned Helplessness, were considered to explain the mechanisms underlying mental block experiences.

Furthermore, the chapter synthesized previous research on psychological issues such as test anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation, as well as cognitive and linguistic challenges such as language difficulties, intrusive thoughts, and cognitive overload. Finally, it addressed environmental stressors such as exam planing, time limits, and social expectations, which all contribute to students' challenges. This review establishes the context for the current inquiry by identifying significant factors and gaps in the previous literature. The next chapter presents the research methodology, detailing the design, data collection tools, sampling strategies, and data analysis procedures employed in this study.

Chapter Two: Research Metodology

The current study aims to investigate the causes of mental block experienced by first-year EFL students during examinations at the University of Mohammed El Bachir El Ibrahimi. After establishing the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for this inquiry, the current chapter focuses on the practical aspects. It begins by reviewing the research questions and outlining the study paradigm and design. Then it describes the research instruments and sampling method used. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection and analysis methods. The chapter ends with a discussion of research quality and ethical issues.

Research Questions and Objectives

Given that the purpose of this study is to investigate the fundamental reasons of mental blocks faced by EFL students during examinations at Mohammed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University, the following research questions will lead the investigation:

1. What are students' perceptions regarding the factors that contribute to mental blocks during EFL examinations?
2. What psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors do students identify as influencing their performance during exams?
3. What suggestions do students offer to help prevent or overcome mental blocks during EFL examinations?

As a result, this research intends to:

- To investigate the psychological, cognitive, linguistic, and environmental factors that contribute to mental blocks during examinations among first-year EFL students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University, and to explore possible strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Research Paradigm

This research is grounded in the positivist paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity, empirical measurement, and the discovery of generalizable truths through observable data. Positivism holds that reality is objective and can be understood through systematic observation and statistical analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In this view, knowledge is gained through measurable and verifiable facts, independent of personal interpretation or context.

The positivist worldview prioritizes quantitative methodologies to uncover patterns, relationships, and trends in a population. Accordingly, this study employs a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate EFL learners' mental blocks during examinations. Through the use of a structured questionnaire primarily composed of close-ended questions the study aims to collect standardized data that can be statistically analyzed to describe the frequency and distribution of exam-related psychological barriers among students.

The inclusion of a small number of open-ended questions serves a limited exploratory purpose, offering slight elaboration without compromising the study's primary objective: identifying generalizable patterns. As the positivist paradigm values replicability, neutrality, and precision, the focus remains on ensuring reliable data collection and objective interpretation, minimizing researcher bias.

By adhering to a positivist approach, this research seeks to produce valid, measurable results that can inform broader educational practices. The findings aim to contribute to a more scientific understanding of how mental blocks during exams impact EFL learners, with the goal of supporting data-driven interventions and solutions.

Research design

In maintaining with the positivist paradigm, this study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the experiences of EFL learners who encounter mental blocks during examinations. Descriptive research is particularly appropriate for studies aiming "to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or programme" (Kumar, 2011, p. 10) and is well-suited for understanding the current state of underexplored issues. Since exam-related mental barriers among Algerian EFL learners have not been thoroughly investigated, this approach allows the researcher to identify "patterns and trends without altering the environment in which the data occur" (Creswell, 2014, p. 155).

The primary data collection tool is a questionnaire, composed mainly of close-ended questions, which are used to collect quantifiable data regarding test anxiety, performance challenges, emotional reactions, and coping strategies. As Krosnick and Presser (2010) note, "close-ended questions facilitate consistent interpretation and easy statistical analysis" (p. 263). In addition, a limited number of open-ended questions were included to provide space for learners to express personal reflections and contextual details in their own words. This allows for "greater depth of response and insight into respondents' reasoning" (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 48), adding meaning to the statistical findings.

By integrating both structured and open-response items within a single instrument, this design supports a more nuanced understanding of learners' experiences. As Johnson and Christensen (2017) explain, even within a predominantly quantitative framework, the inclusion of open-ended questions "can enrich the interpretation of descriptive results" (p. 293). Therefore, this approach ensures a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, balancing measurable trends with learner perspectives grounded in real-life exam experiences.

Research Instruments

In accordance with the quantitative descriptive research design of this study, a self-administered questionnaire was used as the sole data collection instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to first-year university EFL students to explore their experiences with mental blocks during examinations. This tool was chosen due to its effectiveness in gathering standardized data from a large population, enabling the researcher to identify trends, frequencies, and relationships related to test anxiety and cognitive obstacles in exam settings.

Structred Questionnaire

As Brown (2001) explains, a questionnaire is a written tool comprising a set of structured questions or prompts that participants respond to in written form. It is particularly suitable for educational research because it offers a practical, time-efficient, and cost-effective method for collecting data from a large group of participants (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005). In this study, the questionnaire was designed to address various dimensions of learners' exam-related experiences while maintaining consistency and objectivity in data collection.

The instrument included both close-ended and open-ended questions. Close-ended questions—such as Likert-scale items, binary yes/no options, and multiple-choice formats—provided quantifiable data that could be easily coded and analyzed statistically. These items allowed for the identification of common patterns and the comparison of responses across the participant group (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Furthermore, close-ended questions reduced the risk of researcher bias by limiting subjective interpretation during data analysis.

To complement the quantitative data, the questionnaire also included a limited number of open-ended questions, which gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. As Holmes (2023) notes, open-ended responses can provide richer context and insight into respondents' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Although the primary focus of the study

remained quantitative, the inclusion of open-ended items added explanatory value to the numerical findings.

By incorporating both closed and open question formats within a single instrument, the questionnaire enabled a comprehensive and descriptive examination of EFL students' mental blocks during examinations. It supported the objectives of the quantitative descriptive design by offering both measurable data and limited contextual depth.

Piloting the Research Instruments

Before beginning the actual data collection, the researchers conducted a small-scale pilot study to evaluate and improve the research tools. Piloting is the preliminary testing of tools prior to the primary data collection procedure (Vogel & Draper-Rodi, 2017). According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), pilot testing is critical in refining the research instruments' questions, layout, and instructions (p. 216). It also allows researchers to collect feedback on how well the instrument works, which can lead to significant changes before complete implementation (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010).

Our supervisor reviewed the questionnaire multiple times before transferring it to a digital version using Google Forms. It was then sent to first-year English students via a Google Form link. Participants gave positive comments, stating that the questions were clear, well-structured, and relevant. Our teacher suggested to add consent form andsetting the question "What strategies do you use to manage exam anxiety?" to the end of the questionnaire to serve as a reflective summary. Furthermore, two additional questions "How do you think improving your English proficiency could help reduce mental blocks?" and "Do you think that exams should include alternative assessment methods?" were proposed and integrated to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives on potential solutions and preferred assessment formats.

To improve the questionnaire's clarity and structure, numerous modifications were done. It was divided into four independent portions to improve flow. Changes were also made to the language, visual design, spacing, and typeface based on comments from both the supervisor and pilot participants. Open-ended questions were supplemented by rationale categories, and each section contained clear instructions to help participants complete the form effectively.

Setting and Sampling Technique

This study was conducted at the Department of English at Mohamed El-Bachir El Ibrahimi University in Bordj Bou Arreridj (BBA) during the academic year 2024–2025. The place was chosen primarily for its accessibility, as we are part of an academic environment, which makes data collection easier. Furthermore, time constraints made it necessary to choose a familiar and easy settings. The study used a quantitative descriptive approach using a single data collection tool: a questionnaire that comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Participants were chosen using simple random sampling to ensure that each student had an equal chance of being included. This technique was used to reduce bias and ensure that the results were representative of the target population. The sample included 82 first-year English students from Mohamed El-Bachir El Ibrahimi University. These students were chosen because they are new to university-level examinations, which may make them more likely to experience mental blocks during examinations. The participants included both male and female students, varying in age from 17 to 20. The questionnaire enabled us to obtain quantitative data by using closed-ended questions as well as qualitative insights by using open-ended ones. This technique allowed us to study the reasons behind mental blocks during examinations from both statistical and personal viewpoints, resulting in a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon among first-year EFL students.

Data Collection Procedures

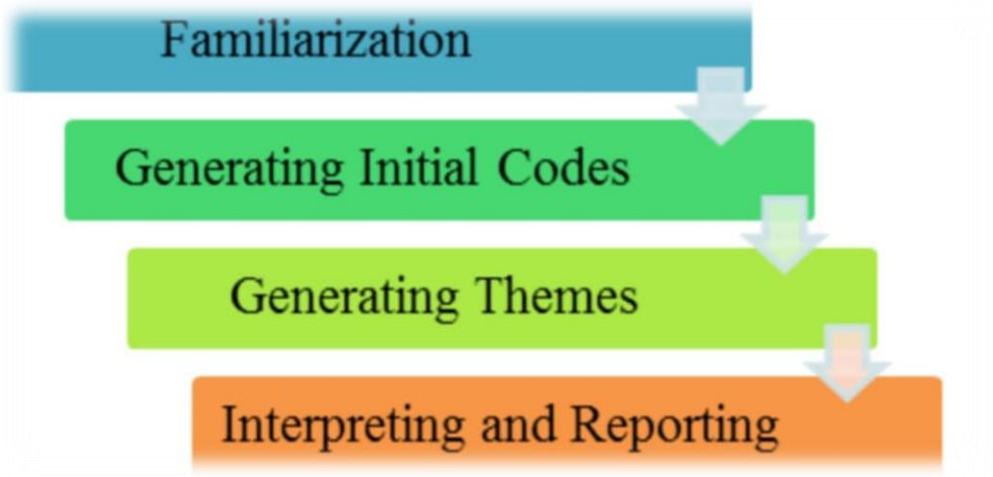
After designing the research instrument and obtaining the necessary approval, we began the data collection process . The questionnaire was developed with Google Forms and delivered online to first-year English students at Mohamed El-Bachir El Ibrahimi University in Bordj Bou Arreridj.The data collection took place between April 15th and April 21st, 2025 . The link to the Google Form was shared with students through their class groups and online platforms commonly used for communication. In the message accompanying the link, we introduced ourselves, explained the purpose of the research, and clarified that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Students were also informed that their answers would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

We received a total of 82 responses from first-year students. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing us to collect quantitative data along with qualitative insights into the factors contributing to mental blocks during examinations.

Data analysis

Figure 2 :

Thematic Analysis Process Descriptive Quantitative Design by John W. Creswell (2014) and Harvard Catalyst (2025).



Student Questionnaire Analysis

As mentioned before, a descriptive quantitative method approach was used to analyze the responses to the students' questionnaire. Closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Excel, whereas open-ended replies were studied using thematic analysis, which was supported by Gemini and ClaudeAI.After gathering the data, responses were collated using Google Forms and exported to Excel (Microsoft Office 2010) and SPSS Statistics Software (v. 28). These platforms were used to calculate frequencies and percentages, as well as provide graphic outputs like tables and pie charts. According to Denscombe (2010), descriptive statistics provide an efficient and systematic way for organizing and summarizing data, investigating relationships, and visually expressing findings. Similarly, Creswell & Creswell (2018) highlight the significance of utilizing frequencies and means to express patterns. Pie charts and tables were utilized effectively in this study to depict replies to closed-ended questions about the frequency of mental blocks, sources of exam stress, and preferred study methods.Thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative replies to uncover patterns in the data and create helpful insights. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible and basic tool for detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. It goes beyond simply counting words to capture rich data about the participants' experiences and meanings.Thematic analysis was undertaken using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, as follows:

Data Familiarization

All open-ended replies were organized into a single Word document and reviewed several times to acquire a thorough knowledge of the content. Responses were originally sorted by question and analyzed to find early insights and recurring themes.

Generating First Codes

Using Gemmeni.AI(2024) , we started methodically coding significant data segments. Initial codes were created manually and using software tools to capture major qualities relevant to the research issue (e.g., "exam fear," "lack of vocabulary," "last-minute cramming").

Theme Search

Codes were collected and examined to uncover larger patterns of significance. These codes were divided into various topics, including "Emotional Distress," "Language Barriers," "External Pressures," and "Study Habits."

Theme Review

The found themes were improved and compared to the dataset to guarantee coherence and distinctness. Some topics were combined, separated, or eliminated based on relevancy and coherence.

Defining and Naming Themes

Once decided, themes were properly defined and given names that captured their essence. For example, "Emotional Distress" featured repeating themes such as worry, fear of failure, and uneasiness, and "Language Barriers" covered problems with vocabulary, syntax, and sentence structure.6. Report creation: The findings were written up and supported by data quotes. To retain clarity and authenticity, quotes were anonymised and linked to question numbers (for example, Q.15)

This method allowed us to identify both common and differing viewpoints on the reasons of mental barriers during exams. The frequency of theme occurrence was also recorded, revealing which issues were most common among participants.Conclusion This study provided a comprehensive understanding of the psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors that

contribute to mental blocks during exams among first-year EFL students by combining quantitative tools (SPSS and Excel) and qualitative thematic analysis (Gemmeni AI). The thematic approach gave not just structured insight but also deeper interpretation of individual experiences, helping us to gain a greater understanding of the complexities of exam-related issues encountered by students.

Research Validity and Reliability

In quantitative research, validity refers to the degree to which an instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure, while reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the quality of this study's findings, both validity and reliability were carefully addressed during the design and implementation of the research instrument.

Validity

According to Kumar (2011), content validity is achieved when the items in a questionnaire adequately cover all aspects of the construct being studied. In this study, the questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor and piloted with a group of first-year EFL students. Their feedback was used to revise unclear items, restructure the layout, and improve the wording of several questions, ensuring that the tool reflected the study's objectives.

To ensure construct validity, the items were developed based on key themes and variables identified in the literature review, such as test anxiety, language difficulties, and exam preparation strategies. As Dörnyei (2003) affirms, aligning questionnaire items with theoretical constructs is essential to ensure that the instrument accurately measures what it claims to assess.

Reliability

Reliability in quantitative studies refers to the degree to which an instrument produces stable and consistent results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, reliability was enhanced through careful piloting, which allowed the researchers to identify ambiguous questions and improve internal consistency. According to Denscombe (2010), piloting helps ensure that participants interpret questions in the intended way and respond consistently.

In addition, the use of closed-ended questions, including Likert-scale items, contributed to the consistency of responses. As Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) note, structured and standardized questions reduce the chances of misinterpretation and allow for easier quantification of results.

Although only one data collection tool was used, the structured questionnaire, the steps taken to establish its validity and reliability such as expert review, pilot testing, and alignment with research objectives ensured the accuracy, trustworthiness, and replicability of the findings within a positivist, quantitative framework.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research are critical (Merriam & Grenier, 2019); therefore, we followed ethical considerations throughout our work, in accordance with the British Educational Research Association ethical standards (2018). We used the following measures:

We informed all first-year English students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University that their participation was completely voluntary. The goal of the study, potential risks and benefits, and the possibility to withdraw at any time were all clearly defined at the beginning of the Google Form.

At the start of the questionnaire, students were shown a digital consent section. They provided informed consent by agreeing to and completing the questionnaire.The form provided a full

description of the study's purpose, nature, and how the data will be utilized to solve any ethical problems. Although we did not utilize pseudonyms or numerical codes, we ensured participants' secrecy and anonymity. No names or identifying information were gathered, and the responses were kept secure and only utilized for academic purposes.

"The validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the researcher" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 46); thus, we remained as objective as possible during data collection, analysis, and presentation, ensuring that participants' responses were respected and unaffected by personal bias.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we provided a full description of the research methods used in our study. We described the research design, data collection tool, research environment, sampling methodology, and data collection processes, offering explicit reasons for each methodological decision . Our study adopted a descriptive quantitative method approach through the use of a single instrument: a questionnaire combining both closed and open-ended questions.

We also outlined the techniques used for analysing the collected data—descriptive statistical analysis for the quantitative items, and qualitative content analysis for the open-ended responses. Finally, we described the ethical considerations followed throughout the study to ensure transparency, confidentiality, and research integrity.

The following chapter presents and discusses the findings obtained from the student questionnaire.

Chapter Three : Results and Finding

This chapter presents and discusses the results obtained from the students' questionnaire, which served as the sole research instrument in this study. The research adopted a quantitative descriptive approach, to investigate the reasons behind mental blocks experienced by EFL students during examinations. The study was conducted as a case study involving first-year English students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University.

The chapter is structured into two main parts. In the first part, the results of the closed-ended questions are presented and analysed using descriptive statistical methods. These results are displayed through tables and pie charts to highlight key patterns and tendencies in students' responses. In the second part, the open-ended responses are examined through thematic analysis in order to explore students' perspectives and personal experiences regarding the factors that contribute to mental blocks during exams.

The final section of the chapter brings together both quantitative and qualitative findings and discusses them in light of the research questions and objectives and pervious studies . This integrated analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by linking statistical trends with personal insights expressed by the participants.

Analysis of Student Questionnaire

This section presents the findings derived from the students' questionnaire. The data collected from the closed-ended questions are analysed using descriptive statistical methods to identify common trends and patterns. The analysis of these quantitative results is supported by tables and pie charts for visual clarity. Following this, the open-ended responses are examined through qualitative thematic analysis, drawing on students' own words to provide deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives.

Background information

Q1 : Have you ever experienced a mental block during an exam?

Table 01

Students' experiences with mental blocks during exams

Options	Number	Percentage
No	5	6,1%
Yes	77	93,9%

The Table clearly shows that the majority of respondents (93.9%) had experienced a mental block during exams, with only a small minority (6.1%) reporting not having this problem. The findings highlight the prevalence of exam-related mental blocks among students, emphasizing the need of identifying the root causes and applying interventions to prevent their recurrence. Addressing these difficulties through focused treatments may play a critical role in enhancing student academic performance and overall well-being.

Q2 : If yes, how often do you experience mental blocks?

Table 2

Frequency of mental blocks during exams

Options	Number	Percentage
Always	3	3,7%
Often	13	15,9%
Rarely	19	23,2%
Sometimes	47	57,3%

According to the statistics presented, mental blocks occur at various frequencies among students who encounter them. The majority (57.3%) stated that they sometimes have mental blocks , while a smaller but significant number (23.2%) noted that these barriers occur only

rarely. Furthermore, 15.9% of respondents claimed that they frequently have mental barriers, with just a small minority (3.7%) reporting that they do so all the time. This distribution shows that, while mental blockages are a common problem, they tend to occur infrequently rather than consistently for most students. Those who chose "Sometimes" may be influenced by specific environmental conditions, such as the difficulty of exam questions, time limits, or shifts in personal stress levels.Students who "rarely" experience mental blocks may benefit from strong coping abilities, effective study routines, or a high tolerance for academic stress. On the other side, the smaller relationship of students who encounter mental blocks "often" or "always" may be dealing with more serious issues, such as chronic anxiety, inadequate preparation methods, or undiagnosed learning disabilities that consistently impair their exam performance. These findings highlight the importance of understanding differences in how student encounter mental obstacles. They also emphasize the importance of specific assistance techniques, such as academic coaching, stress management seminars, and personalized learning plans, in assisting students to lessen the frequency and impact of mental blocks in exam settings.

Psychological Factors

Q3 : What emotions do you experience during exams? (Tick all that apply)

Table 03

Emotions experienced during exams

Options :		Number	Percentage
emotions experience during exams[a]	Nervousness	22	26,8%
	Fear of failure	**29**	**35,4%**
	Lack of confidence con	3	3,7%
	Confusion	19	23,2%
	Other	9	11,0%

Total	82	100,0%

According to the research, the most common emotion mentioned by students during exams is fear of failure, which was cited by 35.4% of participants. Following that, 26.8% of students reported feeling nervous. Furthermore, confusion was identified as a significant emotional response, impacting 23.2% of respondents. A smaller percentage (11.0%) reported experiencing other emotions, with lack of confidence being the least reported emotion, cited by only 3.7% of students. Fear of failure was the most prevalent emotional response, selected by 29 pupils. These data imply that tests elicit a wide range of emotional responses, with anxiety-related feelings being the most common.

The prevalence of fear of failure and nervousness emphasizes the great pressure students frequently feel to succeed, which can have a significant influence on their emotional well-being. Confusion may indicate difficulty understanding exam information, which may be exacerbated by stress or inadequate preparation. Interestingly, the most low percentage of students reporting a lack of confidence implies that, while many students are anxious they do not necessarily question their overall ability. Rather, their emotional responses appear to be caused by situational pressures unique to the exam setting. These emotions can have a significant impact on cognitive performance during exams, potentially leading to issues including mental blocks, decreased concentration, and impaired recall.

Cognitive and Linguistic Difficulties

Q5 : Do you struggle with organising your thoughts when answering exam quetions ?

Table 04

Difficulties in organising thoughts during exams

Options	Number	percentage
No	21	25,6%
Yes	61	74,4%

This table illustrates that a significant proportion of students (74.4%) struggle with organizing their thoughts while answering exam questions, whereas only 25.6% reported no such difficulty. These findings suggest that a large number of learners encounter obstacles in clearly and logically structuring their responses during exams, which can hinder their ability to communicate their knowledge effectively even when they understand the material.

This difficulty may stem from various contributing factors, such as exam pressure, limited time , or insufficient development of critical thinking and written communication skills in high-pressure contexts. As a result, students who struggle with organizing their thoughts may produce disorganized answers, repeat information unnecessarily, or lose focus—all of which can negatively impact their performance.

As a result, students who struggle to organize their ideas may give disorganized replies, repeat information, or lose attention, all of which can have a detrimental impact on their performance. In contrast, the smaller number of students who do not confront this challenge may benefit from well-developed cognitive methods, such as outlining, planning, and stress management skills, which assist them in maintaining clarity and coherence in their responses. Overall, the graph emphasizes the necessity of teaching methods that not only reinforce topic knowledge but also help students acquire the capacity to structure and effectively convey their thoughts during tests.

Q6 : Which aspects of exams are most difficult for you? (Tick all that apply)

Table 05

Most challenging aspects of exams

Options :		Number	percentage
Which aspects of exams are most difficult for you?	Understanding the question	14	16,9%
	Remembering the answer	**30**	**36,1%**
	Writing responses clearly	23	27,7%
	Managing time	14	16,9%
	others	1	2,4%
Total		82	100,0%

The Table illustrates that the most commonly stated obstacle students experience during tests is "Remembering the answer," which received 36.6% of replies, showing severe recall issues. This is followed by 28.0% of students who find "writing responses clearly" challenging, indicating a problem with effectively expressing thoughts. 17.1% of respondents found both "Understanding the question" and "Managing time" to be challenging, with only 2.4% selecting "Others." These findings represent important cognitive and practical hurdles during tests, notably memory-related challenges, and are consistent with previous data indicating that 93.9% of students encounter mental blocks.Overall, the results show exams as difficult activities in which students must navigate connected challenges in memory, clarity, comprehension, and time management. The mode here is 14 as it is the number that occurs twice .

Q7 : Do you think language difficulties contribute to your mental blocks?

Table 06 :

Role of language difficulties in mental blocks

	Number	Percentage
No	10	12,2%
Yes	72	87,8%

According to the findings, the majority of students (87.8%) acknowledge that language challenges contribute to mental barriers during tests, with only 12.2% disagreeing. This broad consensus emphasizes the critical role language proficiency plays in exam performance. Many students are likely to struggle with understanding complex instructions, decoding academic vocabulary, and clearly expressing their ideas, all of which can increase cognitive strain and cause mental blocks. These linguistic limitations may hinder their capacity to retrieve information or develop cohesive responses under pressure. The prevalence of this notion among students highlights the need for more assistance in developing academic language abilities, as increasing proficiency may minimize exam-related anxiety and improve students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge successfully.

Q8: If yes, which language skills cause the most difficulty?

Table 07

Language skills causing the most difficulty

Options :		Number	percentage
difficult language skills	**Vocabulary**	**42**	**51%**
	Grammar	9	11%
	Sentence structure	15	18%
	All of the above	16	20%
Total		82	100,0%

answers show that "Vocabulary" is the most common language-related issue contributing to mental blocks, as stated by 51% of students. This is followed by "Sentence structure," which 18% of respondents reported as challenging. Furthermore, 20% said "All of the above," indicating that a combination of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure presents difficulty, while only 11% identified "Grammar" as the key concern. With vocabulary emerging as the most commonly stated difficulty, the research indicates students' struggles in grasping essential concepts within exam questions or articulating their responses using acceptable academic language. These limitations may result in misinterpretation, confusion, and an inability to communicate effectively while under exam pressure. Furthermore, the significant challenges with sentence structure and combined language abilities indicate that many pupils experience broader linguistic challenges, rather than isolated language issues. These findings illustrate the link between language proficiency and mental barriers, as stated in Question 8, and highlight the critical need for instructional interventions aimed at boosting vocabulary and overall academic language competence to improve exam performance.

Exam Environment and External Stressors

Q 9 : Which factors in the exam environment increase your stress? (Tick all that apply)

Table 08

Stressful factors in the exam environment

Options		Number	percentage
factors in the exam environment	Time pressure	25	30,5%
	Strict invigilators	2	2,4%
	Noise/distractions	**46**	**56,1%**
	Unfamiliar question format	9	11,0%
Total		82	100,0%

The data shows that "Noise/distractions" is the most major contributor to exam stress, impacting 56.1% of students, followed by "Time pressure," which affects 30.5% of respondents. Lesser stressors include "unfamiliar question format" (11.0%) and "strict invigilators" (2.4%). This implies that external environmental disruptions, particularly auditory distractions, are substantial sources of stress during exams, underlining the importance of a peaceful and concentrated exam setting. Time constraints also play an important role, with many students noting that having limited time causes panic and affects their ability to think properly and order their responses. While unusual question formats and stringent invigilation are less frequently reported as stressors, they do add to overall anxiety for certain students, with unexpected question kinds eliciting feelings of unpreparedness and rigid supervision creating an atmosphere of tension. These findings highlight the importance of reducing distractions and efficiently managing time in order to reduce stress and support improved exam performance.

Study Habits and Preparation Strategies

Q 11 : How do you usually prepare for exams? (Tick all that apply)

Table 09

Students' exam preparation methods

Options :		Number	percentage
Exam preparation	Cramming last minute	29	35,4%
	Regular study sessions	**33**	**40,2%**
	Group study	3	3,7%
	Practicing past exams	7	8,5%
	Other	10	12,2%
Total		82	100,0%

According to the table, "Regular study sessions" is the most prevalent exam preparation approach, stated by 40.2% of students, followed closely by "Cramming at the last minute," picked by 35.4%. Other ways, such as "practicing past exams" and "group study," are less commonly employed, at 8.5% and 3.7%, respectively, with 12.2% of students adopting them. This data shows a difference in how students prepare for tests, with a small number preferring consistent, continuous study over last-minute intensive revision. Although regular study is often more successful for long-term learning and understanding, the significant number of students who cram indicates that many still rely on this stressful, less effective technique, maybe due to procrastination or poor time management. Furthermore, the poor participation in group study and past exam preparation shows that some effective tactics are being neglected. Preparation methods have a direct impact on confidence and information memory, thus they also influence the possibility of mental blocks during exams. For example, crammers are more likely to experience mental barriers as a result of shallow learning and increased anxiety. These findings underscore the need for educators to promote more consistent and effective study practices to reduce exam stress and improve student performance.

Q12 : Do you believe your study habits contribute to mental blocks?

Table 10

Influence of study habits on mental blocks

Options	Number	Percentage
No	31	37,8%
Yes	51	62,2%

The figures show that a large majority of students (62.2%) believe their study habits contribute to the occurrence of mental blocks, whereas 37.8% do not recognize the connection. This suggests that many students understand the connection between their exam preparation strategies and the cognitive obstacles they confront during examinations. Those who comprehend this connection may be using less productive techniques, such as last-minute cramming (35.4% of respondents reported in a similar question), rather than more consistent approaches, such as regular study sessions (40.2%). Inefficient study habits, such as weak learning, little practice, and poor organization, can increase anxiety and impair memory recall, resulting in mental blocks. Students who do not identify their study habits with mental blockages are more likely to use effective approaches, manage their time, and engage more fully with the topic. Overall, our findings emphasize the critical role of successful study strategies in decreasing cognitive challenges, as well as the necessity for focused educational support to encourage more structured and productive study practices.

Q 16 : Do you think exams should include alternative assessment methods (e.g., oral exams,projects)?

Table 11

Students' opinions on alternative assessment methods

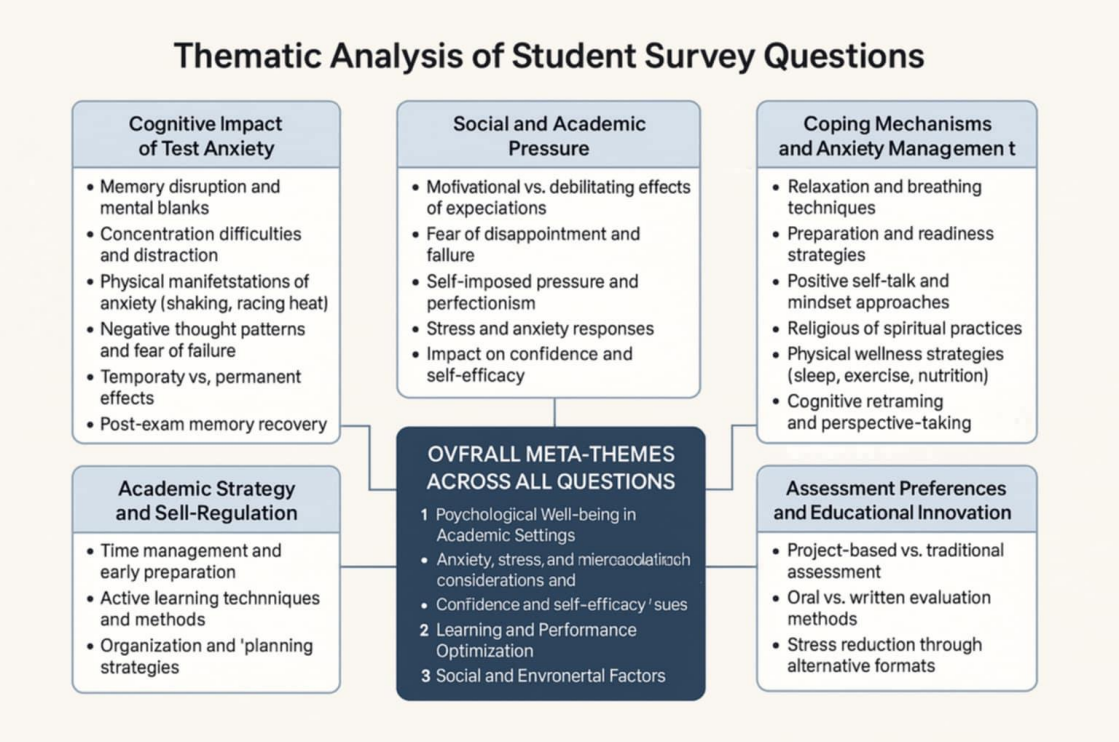
Options	Number	Percentage
No	16	19,5%
Yes	66	80,5%

According to the findings from Question 17, a large majority of students (80.5%) support the use of alternative methods of assessment such as oral exams and projects, while a smaller number (19.5%) prefers to remain with traditional exams. This substantial preference for numerous evaluation formats reflects students' need for assessment procedures that better capture their true comprehension and skills by allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge in many ways. Many students may find traditional written exams restricting or causing anxiety, which can lead to mental blocks and poor performance. Those who prefer traditional exams may do so because they are familiar with the structure or believe it is more equitable. Overall, these data indicate a strong desire among students for more diverse and comprehensive assessment approaches that might minimize exam stress and provide a more complete view of their academic ability.

Thematic Analysis of Open Questions

Figure 3

Research Themes



Q4 : How does anxiety affect your ability to recall information during exams ?

Exam anxiety has a significant impact on students' cognitive functioning, particularly in the context of memory retrieval and knowledge recall. While students may enter the exam room well-prepared, the psychological and physiological impacts of anxiety frequently hinder their ability to recall previous knowledge. The responses from participants show a consistent pattern: anxiety not only impairs their capacity to think properly, but it leads to a variety of mental and physical reactions that interfere with their performance. The results indicated several interconnected patterns to better understand the complex relationship between anxiety and memory.

Memory Disruption and Mental Blanks

Exam anxiety is a well-documented psychological phenomenon that significantly impairs cognitive performance, particularly in high-stakes academic settings. One of its most pronounced and detrimental effects is the disruption of memory retrieval, often experienced by students as "*mental blanks*" during examinations. Despite thorough preparation and

familiarity with the subject matter, students frequently report an inability to recall previously learned information when under exam pressure. This form of cognitive inhibition is a hallmark of anxiety-related performance issues and represents a serious barrier to academic success.

A commonly reported manifestation of this phenomenon is the sudden and inexplicable inability to access stored knowledge during an exam. Students often describe the sensation as their "*mind going blank*," even when they have spent considerable time and effort preparing for the assessment. As one student explained,

"*My mind goes blank, even for stuff I studied*."

This highlights the gap between preparation and performance, wherein anxiety overrides the brain's ability to retrieve information efficiently.

In addition to memory lapses, exam anxiety also triggers a cycle of second-guessing and self-doubt. This internal conflict exacerbates cognitive overload, leading to further difficulties in concentration and decision-making. One student articulated this experience by stating,

"*My mind goes blank or I second-guess myself, which affects my performance*."

This suggests that anxiety not only impairs recall but also disrupts the confidence needed to navigate through an exam effectively.

Students frequently report a feeling of having *"forgotten everything*" when anxiety peaks at the start of an exam. This perception is especially distressing because it contradicts their sense of preparedness. The overwhelming emotional response induced by anxiety including fear, pressure, and panic can obstruct mental clarity, producing what are often termed "memory blocks." As another student noted,

"Anxiety affects my ability to recall information during exams, making it hard to focus and leading to forgetting information."

This underscores the dual impact of anxiety on both memory retrieval and sustained attention. One particularly revealing aspect of anxiety-induced memory disruption is the phenomenon of delayed recall. Many students report that once the exam concludes and the immediate pressure is lifted, they are suddenly able to remember the answers they struggled to retrieve during the test. For instance, a student shared,

"Sometimes, I remember the answers only after the exam is over, when I'm more relaxed."

This indicates that the information was never actually lost but was temporarily inaccessible due to the heightened stress response. The amygdala, which regulates emotional responses, can override the hippocampus the region responsible for memory under stress, temporarily blocking access to information.

Furthermore, the combination of cognitive and physiological responses to anxiety such as increased heart rate, shallow breathing, and muscle tension can reinforce a state of mental paralysis. One student described this as,

"*The mental pressure blocks my focus and makes it hard to retrieve information, especially under time constraints*."

These physical symptoms, coupled with negative thoughts and fear of failure, amplify the sense of being mentally "*stuck*" or frozen in the exam context.

Concentration Difficulties and Mental Distraction

Exam anxiety is widely recognized as a significant barrier to academic performance, not only due to its impact on memory retrieval but also because of the considerable disruption it causes to students' ability to concentrate. The mental strain caused by anxiety often results in persistent distraction, making it extremely difficult for students to remain focused on exam tasks. This loss of concentration is one of the most frequently reported cognitive symptoms associated with test-related stress.

A recurring theme in student feedback is the pronounced difficulty in maintaining concentration during examinations. Many students explicitly state that when they feel anxious, it becomes "*difficult to concentrate*," even when they are familiar with the content. This impaired focus is often attributed to the overwhelming presence of intrusive thoughts, particularly fears of failure, self-doubt, and negative self-talk. The mind, rather than being centered on the exam, becomes consumed with anxiety-driven distractions. One student described this experience by stating,

"Anxiety affects me negatively, as I cannot retrieve information and focus on answering."

This observation highlights the dual impact of anxiety on both memory access and attentional control. Anxiety often initiates a cycle of mental interference in which students' thoughts are continually interrupted by worries about performance, time pressure, or the consequences of failure. These thoughts interfere with cognitive engagement, drawing attention away from the exam content. As one student noted,

"*Anxiety distracts the mind, makes it difficult to concentrate,*"

while another remarked,

"Anxiety distracts me and makes me forget information even if I studied it."

These comments reveal how exam anxiety fosters a mentally chaotic environment where intrusive concerns override cognitive processing, effectively impairing both comprehension and recall.

The sense of mental disorientation caused by anxiety is often likened to a tug-of-war between focus and fear. Students describe being mentally *"pulled*" in different directions between the need to answer questions and the paralysing effect of anxious thoughts. This inner conflict leads to a breakdown in sustained attention. One student candidly shared,

"*Anxiety makes it hard for me to focus on the exam questions*,"

underscoring the consistent struggle to maintain mental presence during assessments.

Furthermore, this compromised concentration often leads directly to forgetfulness. The inability to focus properly prevents students from accessing learned material, even when it has been thoroughly studied. This connection between distraction and memory failure is echoed in student experiences such as,

"*The mental pressure blocks my focus and makes it hard to retrieve information.*"

The failure to sustain attention not only undermines comprehension of exam prompts but also disrupts the cognitive processes required for effective recall.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the challenges of concentration and distraction during exams are not the result of inadequate preparation or lack of effort, but rather the outcome of psychological interference caused by anxiety. Addressing this aspect of anxiety through appropriate support strategies such as mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, or anxiety-reduction techniques can play a vital role in improving students' focus and overall performance under pressure.

Physical Manifestations of Anxiety During Examinations

Exam anxiety not only impairs cognitive functions such as memory and concentration but also often presents with a range of physical symptoms that further compromise students' ability to perform effectively. These physiological reactions are part of the body's natural stress response and, although they are involuntary, they can be intensely distracting and distressing for students. The physical component of anxiety adds another dimension of difficulty during exams, compounding the already existing mental and emotional burden.

A prominent example of this is the experience of involuntary bodily reactions such as trembling hands and an accelerated heart rate. Many students report that, in moments of high

anxiety during an exam, their hands begin to shake uncontrollably and their heartbeat intensifies. As one student expressed,

"Anxiety makes my hands shake, and my heart race."

These symptoms are classic indicators of the body's fight-or-flight response a physiological mechanism designed to prepare the body to respond to perceived danger. In the context of an exam, however, this reaction becomes maladaptive, as there is no real physical threat, yet the body responds as though there were.

These physical sensations can be highly disruptive to the exam process. Shaking hands can affect students' ability to write legibly or complete tasks that require fine motor skills, while a racing heart can create a sense of internal chaos, making it difficult to stay calm and composed. These symptoms do not occur in isolation; they often coexist with cognitive symptoms like difficulty concentrating and retrieving information, creating a multifaceted barrier to performance.

The feeling of being physically overwhelmed also contributes to a psychological sense of being "*stuck*" or paralyzed. When the body reacts with such intensity, students often feel immobilized unable to begin or continue the exam, even if they know the material. The physical discomfort acts as both a distraction and a source of distress, diverting cognitive energy away from the exam and toward managing these bodily sensations. In such cases, the exam environment itself becomes a source of physiological threat, triggering a cascade of anxiety-driven responses.

In addition to visible and felt symptoms like shaking or a pounding heart, exam anxiety also involves less immediately observable but equally impactful physiological processes. One such process is the release of stress hormones, particularly cortisol and adrenaline, which are secreted by the adrenal glands in response to anxiety. Elevated cortisol levels, while beneficial

in short bursts, can impair working memory and reduce the brain's efficiency in accessing stored information a common complaint among anxious students. These hormonal responses highlight the deep interconnection between mind and body: emotional stress triggers chemical changes that, in turn, affect cognitive functioning.

The brain's limbic system especially the amygdala plays a central role in this reaction, identifying the exam as a threat and activating a stress response that influences both body and mind. As a result, students may experience chest tightness, shortness of breath, nausea, sweating, or a general feeling of restlessness, all of which are common physiological manifestations of anxiety. These symptoms not only interfere with exam performance but can also reinforce negative emotional responses, creating a feedback loop where anxiety perpetuates itself.

Negative Thought Patterns and Fear of Failure as Core Elements of Exam Anxiety

At the heart of exam anxiety lie deeply rooted psychological challenges, particularly negative thought patterns and an overwhelming fear of failure. These mental and emotional stressors not only heighten anxiety levels but also create a hostile internal environment that severely undermines students' cognitive functioning and exam performance. The persistent presence of self-critical thoughts and catastrophic thinking fosters a cycle of mental pressure that can be just as debilitating as any physical symptom.

One of the most commonly reported experiences by students is the inability to concentrate due to an ongoing stream of intrusive, negative thoughts. Students describe their minds becoming

"*preoccupied with negative thoughts and fear of failure*,"

which makes it exceptionally difficult to focus on the exam material. Instead of channeling their attention toward understanding and answering questions, they become trapped in a cycle of internal doubt. Typical thoughts such as

"What if I fail?" or "*Everyone else is probably doing better than me*,"

illustrate the nature of this anxious inner dialogue. This rumination diverts cognitive resources away from the task at hand and leads to a breakdown in mental clarity and information recall. As one student put it,

"*The mental pressure blocks my focus and makes it hard to retrieve information, especially under time constraints*."

The fear of failure, in particular, emerges as a dominant psychological force that fuels anxiety. For many students, the fear is not solely about poor academic performance but is tied to deeper emotional concerns such as the fear of disappointing family members, teachers, or themselves. One student expressed,

"I want to make them proud of me, but I fear I will disappoint them instead."

This intense emotional burden transforms the goal of success into a fear-driven obligation, placing students under enormous psychological strain. The pressure to meet expectations, whether imposed externally or internally, can lead to emotional paralysis, where fear overrides rational thinking and academic capability.

This fear-driven mindset often leads to cognitive behaviors such as second-guessing and self-sabotage. Students report experiencing mental blocks where they begin to doubt their knowledge, their answers, and even their overall abilities. One student noted,

"I second-guess my answers and doubt my abilities,"

while another described how such thoughts

"*overlap in answering the exams and make me miserable."*

These statements reveal how negative internal narratives interrupt the flow of thought, shift focus away from solving problems, and instead heighten emotional distress. Rather than engaging with exam questions confidently, students become consumed by the possibility of making mistakes, a pattern that leads to chronic overthinking. As one student described,

"I keep thinking about what if I make a mistake,"

which illustrates how fear can displace concentration and decision-making during critical moments. In more severe cases, the fear of failure combined with negative thought spirals can lead students to feel entirely incapable of accessing their knowledge. This is often expressed as a sensation of having *"forgotten everything*," even when the student has prepared thoroughly. Such instances demonstrate the profound impact psychological stress can have on memory and cognitive function. The student's brain, overwhelmed by anxiety, effectively blocks the retrieval of information, not because the knowledge is absent, but because it becomes temporarily inaccessible due to the emotional overload.

Importantly, these patterns of negative thinking and fear do not operate in isolation. They often create a self-reinforcing feedback loop: anxiety leads to poor performance, which in turn validates the student's negative beliefs about themselves and heightens the fear of failure for future assessments.

This cyclical process deepens the psychological distress over time and erodes self-confidence, leading students to enter subsequent exams with heightened vulnerability.

Q 10 : How does the pressure of high expectations from teachers, family, or peers affect your performance?

Students' responses to this question revealed the deeply complex and multidimensional nature of performance-related pressure. While some perceived high expectations as a motivator to strive for perfection, others experienced them as a source of anxiety, fear, and

self-doubt. The effects of such expectations differed widely depending on students' coping mechanism, internal beliefs, and emotional resilience. The following themes demonstrate how expectations impact students' academic experiences, ranging from external pressure to internalised perfectionism, motivating boosts to psychological tiredness.

Motivational vs. Debilitating Effects of Expectations

Many students described the pressure of high expectations as a double-edged sword that can either fuel motivation or lead to emotional exhaustion. On one hand, the expectations of others can serve as a powerful source of inspiration, pushing students to excel and maintain high standards. Several students expressed that these external expectations were positively received, as they motivated them to work harder and improve their performance. For instance, one student shared,

"*High expectations can motivate me to do my best*," while another said, "*It affects positively, it makes me do my best to show them that I can do it*."

These remarks illustrate how some learners interpret pressure as a sign of belief in their potential, which they channel into determination and achievement. However, for others, these expectations become a source of significant mental and emotional burden. They described a tipping point where motivation turns into stress, and the desire to meet expectations evolves into fear of failing to do so. One student explained,

"High expectations can motivate me, but sometimes they also create stress and pressure," revealing how the same force that pushes performance can simultaneously create overwhelming anxiety. This duality characterises the complex role expectations play in academic performance serving as both a source of drive and a contributor to distress .

Fear of Disappointment and Failure

A profound emotional consequence of high expectations is the overwhelming fear of disappointing others, particularly teachers and family members. This fear was repeatedly mentioned by students who described how the desire to live up to others' hopes created a constant sense of pressure and self-monitoring. One respondent admitted,

"It makes me afraid of failure because I want to make them proud of me, but I fear to disappoint them instead."

The emotional burden of possibly letting down those who believe in them transforms academic challenges into moral tests, where failure feels not just academic but personal. This fear is particularly potent when expectations are rooted in love or admiration, such as from parents or respected teachers. Another student reflected,

"*I feel confused and afraid of not meeting their expectations,*"

highlighting how the anxiety associated with fear of failure leads to hesitation, lack of concentration, and diminished performance. When fear dominates motivation, students begin to operate defensively aiming to avoid mistakes rather than pursue growth. One especially moving response noted,

"*I worry too much about disappointing others, and that takes my focus away from the actual content of the exam.*"

In these cases, pressure evolves into a performance anxiety rooted in emotional guilt and relational responsibility. Students don't fear failure in isolation—they fear the emotional consequences of failing in front of those whose approval matters most to them. This fear, left unaddressed, undermines cognitive clarity and encourages self-sabotage, reinforcing a damaging cycle of pressure, fear, and poor performance.

Self-imposed Pressure and Perfectionism

Beyond external expectations, many students described experiencing self-imposed pressure often more intense than any expectation from others. This inner drive to be flawless, to always meet or exceed standards, stems from perfectionistic tendencies cultivated over time. These students set extremely high benchmarks for themselves, believing that any mistake is a personal failure. One student reflected,

"I don't feel pressure from others, but I get anxious because I really care about my results. I put pressure on myself because I want to succeed and do my best." Another added, *"By stress and anxiety, perfection I feel the need to be flawless, which leads to procrastination or dissatisfaction.*"

These self-generated expectations may arise from previous academic success or a strong internal identity tied to achievement. However, the relentless pursuit of perfection often backfires. Rather than improving performance, it creates fear around not being perfect, which can lead to paralysis, overthinking, or burnout. Several students acknowledged that their need to excel pushed them to over-study or prepare without rest, ultimately harming their focus during exams. One said,

"After their expectations, it gives me pressure, and I start to study non-stop, which makes me burned out on the exam day."

These findings indicate that even in the absence of external pressure, internal perfectionism can function as a silent yet powerful source of academic anxiety, hindering rather than helping performance.

Stress and Anxiety Responses

Stress and anxiety emerged as key psychological consequences of high expectations, whether these came from others or from within. Students reported experiencing symptoms of heightened anxiety such as difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts, emotional distress, and mental exhaustion. The anxiety described was not occasional but persistent, often present during the entire period of exam preparation and performance. One student reported,

"The pressure makes me anxious and affects my concentration and self-confidence during the exam," while another said,

"It can add a lot of stress and anxiety, making it difficult for me to stay focused and recall information effectively."

These responses indicate that the physiological and emotional symptoms of stress—such as rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, and a sense of panic directly interfere with cognitive functions like memory retrieval, focus, and logical thinking. Some students admitted that the pressure made them overthink, resulting in second-guessing or even changing correct answers. Others described feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained even before entering the exam room. The chronic nature of this stress leads to fatigue and mental burnout, particularly when students do not have proper strategies to manage it. Thus, high expectations, when not paired with emotional support or realistic goal-setting, can cause debilitating anxiety that severely compromises academic performance.

Impact on Confidence and Self-efficacy

The influence of high expectations extends to students' sense of self-worth and belief in their own capabilities. While some students reported feeling encouraged and empowered by the faith others placed in them, many expressed that these expectations eroded their confidence and

created self-doubt. In the face of such pressure, students questioned whether they were truly capable of meeting the standards set before them. One student noted,

"*The pressure makes me feel anxious and afraid of failure. I try my best, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed, and this affects my focus and confidence during exams."*

Another shared,

"*It makes me feel that what I offer is not enough, no matter how much effort I put in."*

These comments reflect a psychological cycle where students begin to internalise the belief that their efforts will never measure up, no matter how hard they try. This undermines their sense of self-efficacy the belief that they are capable of succeeding on their own terms. In some cases, even high-performing students felt that their value was based solely on their grades, which made any small failure feel like a personal devaluation. Over time, this can create a fragile academic identity, where students feel motivated only by fear, not by genuine belief in their potential. This erosion of confidence makes it more difficult for students to recover from mistakes or bounce back from setbacks, further deepening their vulnerability to anxiety and poor performance.

Dual Nature of Pressure (Positive Motivation vs. Negative Stress)

The responses revealed a rich, nuanced understanding among students that pressure is not inherently harmful rather, its effect depends on how it is perceived, managed, and supported. Many acknowledged the dual nature of expectations, seeing them as both a burden and a boost. One student wisely stated,

"It affects me both positively and negatively: like motivation boosts and confidence builder, but also like stress and anxiety."

This balancing act between motivation and stress was echoed by others who said things like, *"The pressure of high expectations can be really stressful. It motivates me to work hard, but it also makes me anxious."*

This duality reflects the Yerkes-Dodson law in psychology, which posits that a moderate amount of pressure can enhance performance, while too much leads to decline. Students seem to be intuitively aware of this, noting that when expectations are accompanied by encouragement and emotional support, they feel empowered. Conversely, when expectations are rigid, constant, or emotionally charged, they become a source of distress. One student explained,

"They can boost confidence and push you to succeed, but they might also lead to anxiety and fear of failure if the pressure is too high."

These insights suggest that the way pressure is communicated whether through support or judgement shapes how it is experienced by students. This theme underscores the importance of a balanced academic culture, where high standards are upheld alongside compassion, reassurance, and mental health awareness.

Q13 : If yes, what changes in your study habits could help improve your exam performance?

Students identified several key changes in their study habits that they believe would significantly improve their exam performance and reduce mental blocks. These proposed adjustments span various aspects of learning, from strategic planning and active engagement with material to personal well-being and environmental optimization.

Time Management and Early Preparation

A significant number of students recognised that improving their time management skills and avoiding last-minute revision could enhance their academic performance and reduce stress

during exams. Many of them admitted that poor timing or procrastination was one of the main reasons they underperformed, and that starting earlier would give them more control over their studies. One student stated,

"To improve my exam performance, I can start studying earlier and follow a proper schedule,"

while another acknowledged,

"Maybe, if I don't study at the last minute—good preparation helps."

These responses show a clear awareness that time is a central factor in cognitive retention and exam readiness. Students emphasised the importance of creating structured routines and setting time-bound goals to avoid cramming and allow for deeper comprehension. Another student noted,

"I should start studying earlier and avoid cramming,"

which reflects an understanding that spacing out study sessions over time enhances long-term memory and reduces exam-related anxiety. Some also associated time management with prioritisation, noting that organising study time according to subjects' difficulty or importance could make their preparation more efficient. This sub-theme highlights students' growing awareness of how their control over time directly affects their mental readiness and academic outcomes. It suggests a shift toward proactive learning, where preparation is spread evenly and study becomes a daily habit rather than a panic-driven task.

Active Learning Techniques and Methods

Beyond time management, students expressed the need to adopt active learning techniques to replace passive habits like simply re-reading notes. Several responses reflected an understanding that engaging with the material through practice, retrieval, and application could significantly enhance memory retention and understanding. One student recommended, *"Using*

active study methods like flashcards and practice tests will help me remember better," while another said,

"Test yourself regularly. Study in short bursts. Set goals each session."

These strategies reflect research-supported learning methods such as spaced repetition, active recall, and the Pomodoro technique, all of which help to reinforce learning by requiring students to interact dynamically with content. Some students acknowledged that switching from surface-level memorisation to deeper conceptual understanding would help them retain information longer and apply it better under exam conditions. For example, one participant shared,

"Focusing on understanding rather than memorisation,"

indicating a desire to move toward more meaningful learning approaches. In addition to cognitive techniques, students mentioned the value of using diverse resources such as summaries, videos, or peer teaching to reinforce learning. These reflections indicate that students are aware of the limitations of passive reading and are beginning to appreciate the cognitive benefits of active engagement with study material. This sub-theme reflects a growing sense of academic autonomy and a willingness to experiment with more effective strategies to improve both performance and confidence.

Organization and Planning Strategies

Students also placed strong emphasis on the value of organisation and planning as essential components of successful exam preparation. Many expressed a need to better structure their study habits and materials to reduce overwhelm and maximise efficiency. One student shared, *"Organise your time and avoid studying at the last minute,"* while another mentioned, *"Creating a consistent study schedule and breaking the material into smaller parts could help reduce stress."* These insights point to the importance of structured learning environments, where clarity in planning leads to better focus and reduced anxiety. Students reported that when

they planned in advance using to-do lists, checklists, and prioritised study goals—they were more likely to follow through with studying and stay motivated. One student reflected, *"Highlight the important ideas and set a plan or to-do list,"*

which shows a metacognitive awareness of how breaking large tasks into manageable segments can enhance both clarity and accountability. Others highlighted the benefit of reviewing consistently over time instead of

"cramming everything in the night before,"

indicating an appreciation for distributed practice. Organisation was also linked to emotional calmness; when students knew what to study and when, they felt more confident and less stressed. This sub-theme reveals that students are not just looking to study harder but smarter—by using clear planning to guide their academic efforts and reduce the cognitive overload often associated with exams.

Health and Wellness Considerations (Sleep, Breaks)

Another sub-theme that emerged clearly from students' responses was the critical role of health and wellness in exam success. Students described how physical self-care particularly sleep and rest impacted their ability to study effectively and retain information. One student explained,

"I'll take breaks, get enough sleep, and practice old exam papers to manage time and reduce stress,"

showing an understanding that cognitive performance is tied to mental and physical balance. Others echoed this, stating,

"Create a study environment. Sleep well. Start studying early to avoid last-minute cramming," and *"Start reviewing early, organise your time, take breaks between classes."* These reflections

point to an important realisation: that learning is not simply a matter of mental effort, but also of bodily and emotional regulation. A lack of sleep or rest often led students to feel fatigued, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed. One student candidly noted, *"Sometimes, when I study intensively without taking breaks, I feel exhausted, making it difficult to concentrate or remember information."*

Students recognised that their performance was not just about how much they studied but about how well they treated themselves in the process. Strategies like taking short breaks, avoiding all-night study sessions, and maintaining healthy routines emerged as key recommendations for improving their cognitive readiness. This sub-theme affirms the deep connection between student wellness and academic achievement an area often neglected but vital to sustainable success.

Practice and Repetition Strategies

Repetition, rehearsal, and exam simulation were also frequently mentioned as strategies students believed would improve their performance. Many students reported that practising with past papers, quizzes, or mock exams gave them confidence and reduced anxiety. One student reflected,

"*Solve exam questions from previous years so I can get used to the exam format,"* while another shared,

"Improve exam performance by making a study schedule, using short focused sessions, practising past exams."

The emphasis on repetition suggests that students are aware of the value of familiarity and retrieval practice in solidifying long-term memory. For some, the act of regularly testing themselves on content helped reduce panic and fostered a sense of preparedness. Students also spoke of integrating practice into their routine in a balanced way by mixing subjects, varying

task formats, and reviewing errors. Others noted that repetition helped them identify weak areas and focus their attention more strategically. One student stated,

"*Test yourself regularly. Use varied resources. Plan study time."*

The consistency and rhythm of practice helped transform anxiety into routine, making exams feel less like sudden, high-stakes events and more like extensions of regular learning. This sub-theme reveals that repetition when done with intent and structure—can serve as both a learning tool and a confidence builder, reinforcing knowledge while preparing students emotionally for the exam experience.

Environmental Factors for Studying

Lastly, students highlighted the importance of their physical and social study environments in shaping the effectiveness of their learning. Some explained that their home environments were noisy, distracting, or emotionally overwhelming, which made it difficult to focus. In response, they proposed finding quiet spaces, studying early in the day, or creating more structured personal study zones. One student said,

"Stay in a calm place without any noise at my house or wake up early on my own,"

while another wrote, *"I study each lesson on time and do not leave studying until the last moment."*

These comments suggest that students are starting to reflect on the external conditions that influence their attention and mental clarity. A few even mentioned the idea of having their own personal space for studying as a major factor:

"I think living alone helps everybody to control his time and take his life seriously."

For these students, environmental control wasn't just about silence—it was about autonomy, order, and mental separation from chaos. Creating a designated, distraction-free study zone

allowed them to focus more deeply and sustain their efforts. These reflections illustrate that academic success is shaped not only by cognitive strategies, but by the physical context in which learning occurs. This sub-theme points to the need for educators and families to help students recognise and create study environments that support attention, motivation, and sustained learning.

Q14 : What strategies do you use to manage exam anxiety?

Students use different strategies to deal with exam anxiety, showing that they actively try to manage both their mental and physical reactions. These strategies include quick ways to calm down, long-term study habits, and changes in how they think about exams all with the goal of improving focus and doing well during tests.

Relaxation and Breathing Techniques

One of the most commonly cited strategies among students was the use of relaxation techniques, particularly deep breathing, to calm the body and mind before or during exams. Many students reported turning to breathing exercises in moments of panic or heightened nervousness to help regain focus. One participant wrote,

"Take a deep breath and close my eyes then try to remember the answers," while another said, *"I try to stay calm by taking deep breaths."*

These responses illustrate a physiological understanding of how breathing affects the nervous system, helping to slow heart rate and reduce stress hormones. The simplicity and accessibility of this method makes it a valuable strategy for immediate relief. Another student reflected,

"Try to calm down and breathe deeply,"

signalling the effectiveness of mindful breathing as a grounding tool. For many students, breathing is not just a coping mechanism it is the first line of defence against spiralling anxiety.

This sub-theme demonstrates that students are increasingly aware of body-mind techniques that allow them to regulate emotional responses without needing external resources, making relaxation a powerful and self-reliant form of anxiety control.

Preparation and Readiness Strategies

Many students linked their anxiety management directly to how well they prepared for the exam. For them, anxiety often stems from uncertainty and fear of being unready, so their primary defence is to study effectively and start early. One student stated,

"*I prepare well before the exam so that I don't feel nervous,"* while another elaborated, *"When I feel prepared, I feel relaxed. But if I'm not prepared, even breathing doesn't help."* These insights show that for many, mental preparedness is the foundation of emotional calm. Another student shared,

"I study hard, make summaries, and revise many times. That gives me peace during the exam,"

indicating how strategic studying reinforces confidence. Some mentioned avoiding last-minute cramming as a specific anxiety-reduction tactic:

"I study early and revise daily so that I'm not anxious on the exam day,"

one wrote. Others use review checklists or spaced repetition*:*

"I use revision cards and solve past exams to test myself. This helps me not panic during the real exam."

These strategies reflect a proactive approach—one where students seek to pre-empt anxiety by removing its root cause: uncertainty. Preparation becomes more than studying—it becomes an emotional safety net.

Positive Self-Talk and Mindset Approaches

A significant number of students reported using positive self-talk and intentional mindset shifts to reduce panic and boost emotional control. These students try to reframe their thinking and encourage themselves, even in moments of stress. One student wrote,

"*I keep telling myself: 'You can do it, you studied, and everything is inside your head.' It really helps me calm down,"*

demonstrating a self-coaching style of thinking. Another shared,

"I always think that the exam will be easy and I will do great. Even if it's hard, I pretend it's not."

This cognitive strategy called positive expectation framing—helps the student stay motivated and reduces fear before they even open the test. One particularly powerful response came from a student who wrote,

"I talk to myself. I tell myself to stop thinking about anxiety because it doesn't change anything. I say, 'This is a battle, you must win.'"

This internal monologue transforms the exam into a challenge that the student is mentally and emotionally prepared to face. Another learner stated,

"I try to replace the negative thoughts with positive ones like, 'You've studied, you can do this,'"

showing the conscious practice of cognitive restructuring. These responses reflect a critical development in students' emotional maturity: the ability to change their own internal narrative and reframe anxiety as a manageable emotion rather than an uncontrollable threat.

Religious or Spiritual Practices

For many students, religious practices such as prayer, reciting the Qur'an, or trusting in God serve as powerful emotional stabilisers during exam periods. This spiritual grounding provides reassurance and helps reframe the anxiety-inducing experience of an exam within a broader sense of meaning and trust. One student said,

"*I read Qur'an and pray before the exam. It makes my heart calm,"*

while another wrote,

"I always make du'a (supplication) before entering the exam room."

These routines are not merely habitual they carry emotional and spiritual weight. Students who draw on faith often feel less alone in their anxiety, and their belief in divine support seems to reduce their emotional burden. A respondent reflected,

"I remind myself that God is with me and He will not let me down,"

while another stated,

"I read verses from the Qur'an and trust in Allah's help, and it gives me inner peace."

This kind of spiritual resilience enables students to step back from the high pressure of exams and take comfort in a belief system that assures them that effort, not outcome, is what truly matters. These answers demonstrate that for many learners, faith is not just a spiritual identity but also an anxiety-coping mechanism rooted in trust, gratitude, and emotional security.

Physical Wellness Strategies (Sleep, Exercise, Nutrition)

A smaller but significant group of students highlighted the importance of physical self-care including good sleep, hydration, rest, and even movement as a way to manage anxiety. These

students understand that mental clarity and emotional balance rely heavily on how well the body is treated. One participant wrote,

"I try to sleep early before exams, drink water, and avoid sugar so I don't feel dizzy or tired," showing a functional understanding of how the body affects cognition. Another said,

"I rest the day before and make sure to eat a light meal before the test. If I'm hungry or tired, I can't concentrate."

These responses show that students are becoming increasingly mindful of the connection between their physical health and academic performance. A few students also mentioned exercise as a coping method:

"I do some stretches before leaving the house on exam day it helps my nerves."

Some also tied wellness to routine, such as

"I take a shower, prepare my clothes, and make sure my bag is ready the night before. That makes me less stressed in the morning."

These reflections suggest that students are beginning to see anxiety management not only as a mental task but as a holistic approach involving body and mind together.

Cognitive Reframing and Perspective-Taking

several students showed clear signs of using cognitive reframing a mental strategy where anxiety is interpreted in a new light. Rather than fighting the feeling, students attempt to see it as normal, temporary, or even helpful. One student shared,

"I remind myself that stress is normal, and even if I feel nervous, it means I care," which transforms anxiety from a threat into a sign of engagement. Another wrote,

"*I try to imagine the exam as just another activity. I say, 'It's not a war; it's a chance to show what I know.'"*

This deliberate shift in perspective reduces the emotional weight of the test. A powerful example came from a student who said,

"When I feel afraid, I try to laugh at the fear. I say, 'It's just an exam. It won't kill me.'"

This humorous reframing shows emotional courage and helps reduce the sense of threat. Others described focusing not on the result, but on the process:

"I try to think about doing my best instead of getting the highest grade." These students do not ignore anxiety they engage with it and reinterpret its meaning. This sub-theme reveals a high level of self-awareness and mental flexibility, traits that are essential for long-term academic and emotional resilience.

Q15 : How do you think improving your English proficiency could help reduce mental blocks?

Students responses to this question demonstrate a clear understanding of the relationship between language abilities and academic achievement under pressure. Many people stated that difficulties with English not only hinder their understanding and expression, but also increase anxiety and cause mental blocks during examinations. They view improving their English skills as a means to achieving smoother thinking, more confident participation, and less psychological distress in exam settings. The insights presented reveal that language skills are more than just a subject requirement for these students; they serve as a basis for improved communication, emotional management, and academic resilience. Their responses revealed the following sub-themes, explaining the different ways that improved English proficiency might help mental ease and cognitive flow during examinations.

Communication Clarity and Expression

One of the most prominent sub-themes was students' desire for clearer self-expression during exams. Several learners described how difficulty in expressing their ideas in English contributed to mental blocks.

One student reflected,

"*Sometimes I know the answer in Arabic, but I can't say it in English, so I just freeze,"* showing how language becomes a bottleneck for knowledge transfer. Another student explained,

"When I can't explain my ideas, I feel blocked. Improving my English will help me say what I think,"

which illustrates the importance of expressive fluency in reducing exam hesitation.

Many students admitted that even when they understood the concept mentally, they struggled to translate it into grammatically correct or academically appropriate English, which caused panic and disorientation during tests. As one noted,

"If I can't write what I want to say, I get stuck and lose time."

This difficulty in articulation not only affects performance but also confidence. The act of being unable to express a known idea leads to feelings of incompetence and anxiety. Improving language proficiency, therefore, is seen as a key step toward achieving fluency in thought expression allowing students to confidently convert knowledge into language without fear of making critical errors or losing marks due to unclear answers.

Comprehension and Understanding Improvements

Another major insight shared by students was the role of language comprehension in avoiding mental blocks. When exam instructions, reading passages, or even questions are misunderstood, students find themselves confused and paralysed. One student admitted,

"I sometimes don't understand the question in English, so I panic and forget everything," directly linking comprehension difficulties to memory shutdowns. Others echoed similar struggles:

"If I don't understand the question, I can't answer even if I studied the lesson."

These responses illustrate that comprehension is not just about vocabulary but involves syntactic familiarity, academic phrasing, and an ability to grasp nuanced meaning—skills that come with proficiency. When students lack these skills, they expend additional cognitive energy trying to decode the question, leaving less mental space for retrieving and organising the answer. One respondent captured this perfectly:

"If I understand the question quickly, I will be able to think and answer without panic."

Thus, comprehension ability acts as a gateway to performance, and students who feel confident in their reading and listening skills are more likely to engage with the exam calmly and analytically. This sub-theme reveals that improving English proficiency reduces the likelihood of confusion, and, by extension, mental blockage, by strengthening students' capacity to process and understand academic input efficiently.

Confidence Building Through Language Mastery

Many students also reported that improving their English would directly impact their confidence, which in turn would reduce exam-related mental blocks. Confidence, for these learners, is not merely an emotional trait but a consequence of skill mastery. One student wrote,

"When my English gets better, I feel more sure about myself in exams,"

pointing to the empowerment that comes from linguistic competence. Another student expressed,

"If I feel good about my English, I won't be scared to answer,"

showing that fear and uncertainty often stem from language insecurity. These reflections align with research in language acquisition that identifies confidence as a by-product of fluency and accuracy. Students often fear being judged for grammar mistakes, pronunciation errors, or incomplete sentences, which can lead them to withhold answers even when they know the content. One participant admitted,

"I hesitate to answer because I'm afraid I'll say it wrong," while another said, *"If I improve my English, I will feel brave to speak or write."*

These insights show that language proficiency is not just about accuracy it's about confidence. When students trust in their ability to communicate correctly, they are more likely to take academic risks, attempt complex answers, and approach exams with a calmer, more focused mindset.

Reduced Anxiety About Language Errors

Closely linked to confidence is the reduction of anxiety about making mistakes. Several students reported that fear of language errors spelling mistakes, grammatical slips, or misused vocabulary frequently led to hesitation or complete mental blocks. One student said,

"I keep thinking I'll write something wrong, so I prefer not to answer at all,"

showing how error anxiety can become paralysing. Others described how the pressure to write or speak 'perfect English' added to their stress, especially in oral exams.

"I know the answer but I'm afraid to say it because my English isn't perfect,"

one student shared. This fear of judgment or correction causes students to second-guess themselves, slow down, or even abandon answers mid-way. Improving English proficiency, they believe, would reduce this fear and give them the courage to express ideas without the constant worry of being wrong. Another student noted,

"If my English gets better, I won't think too much about mistakes—I will just focus on the answer,"

which illustrates how language mastery helps redirect attention from form to content. This shift is crucial for reducing exam anxiety and preventing the kind of overthinking that often leads to mental blocks. By lowering the psychological cost of making mistakes, students free up cognitive resources for problem-solving and expression.

Enhanced Cognitive Flexibility

Some students demonstrated a deeper understanding of how language skills contribute to cognitive flexibility the ability to think clearly, switch perspectives, and adapt ideas under pressure. A few mentioned that limited vocabulary or sentence structure makes it harder for them to explain complex thoughts, forcing them into mental dead ends. One student wrote,

"If my vocabulary is limited, I can't find the right word and that makes me freeze," highlighting how lack of linguistic range can trap students in silence. Another added, *"Improving my English will help me think faster and explain better,"*

suggesting that language proficiency accelerates mental processing by reducing the time spent searching for words. This fluency enables students to remain fluid in their thinking, adapt answers on the spot, and navigate unexpected exam questions with greater ease. One student reflected,

"When I know many words, I can change my way of answering. If I forget something, I find another way to say it,"

which shows how language richness supports academic agility. This sub-theme illustrates that beyond grammar and comprehension, English proficiency shapes how students think, plan, and adapt skills essential for avoiding rigid thinking and mental shutdowns during high-pressure moments.

Access to Broader Learning Resources

students pointed to the role of English proficiency in granting them access to a wider range of academic materials, which in turn builds knowledge and reduces exam stress.

Several students observed that the best online resources, video explanations, or articles are often available only in English. One stated,

"If my English improves, I can understand more things from the internet, and that will help me study better,"

while another said,

"There are many helpful videos on YouTube, but they are in English. If I understand them, I can prepare better for exams."

This access to global resources not only enriches content understanding but also exposes students to different styles of thinking and explanation, helping them grasp concepts more effectively. One respondent wrote,

"When I understand English better, I can learn from many places, not just my teacher," which reflects an increased sense of academic independence. The availability of diverse study tools builds confidence and provides additional clarification, reducing the fear of confusion and

mental blocks during tests. Language, in this context, becomes a bridge to self-directed learning and exam readiness.

Q17 : If yes, which alternative assessment methods would you prefer? Why?

Students who showed interest in alternative assessment methods shared thoughtful and varied opinions, shaped by both emotional and academic reasons. Their answers show a clear preference for assessments that highlight their strengths, lower exam-related stress, and encourage deeper, more meaningful learning. Instead of standard written tests, many students favored formats that promote creativity, practical skills, and personal expression. The following themes illustrate why these students prefer alternative assessments over traditional exams.

Project-Based vs. Traditional Assessment

A strong preference for project-based assessment emerged from many students who felt that written exams do not allow them to fully demonstrate their abilities. Projects were viewed as more inclusive, practical, and meaningful forms of assessment that extend beyond memorisation. One student explained,

"Projects help me express what I've learned through my own ideas, not just answering fixed questions," while another wrote, *"I prefer doing research and projects because I feel more free and I can organise my thoughts better."*

These responses suggest that projects allow students to engage in sustained learning over time, apply critical thinking, and take ownership of their work. The depth and flexibility of project work are often seen as more representative of a student's true academic capabilities than high-stakes, time-limited exams. Others also mentioned that project-based assessments allow them to incorporate multiple skills such as writing, reading, analysis, and creativity—into one task. One participant highlighted,

"In projects, I feel relaxed and I use many sources. I don't get stuck like in exams."

These reflections demonstrate that project-based assessment supports a more process-oriented approach to evaluation, giving students the space to explore, reflect, and revise features that are often missing from traditional testing formats.

Oral vs. Written Evaluation Methods

Many students also expressed a clear preference for oral evaluations over written exams, stating that they find it easier to communicate their ideas verbally and interact with their teacher rather than writing under pressure. One student shared,

"Oral tests help me because I can explain things with my voice, not just write everything perfectly,"

while another said,

"I feel more confident talking than writing. In oral tests, I can correct myself or add something, but in writing, once it's wrong, it's over."

This perspective reflects the dynamic nature of oral communication, where students feel they have more room for spontaneity, clarification, and immediate feedback. Several respondents mentioned that written tests feel rigid and intimidating, whereas oral evaluations create a space for dialogue and real-time expression. One student noted,

"Oral exams show how much we understand, not just how well we write,"

suggesting that oral formats better capture comprehension and verbal fluency, especially for language learners. Moreover, some students pointed out that oral assessments reduce the pressure to write grammatically perfect answers under time constraints, which often contributes to mental blocks. These responses highlight how shifting toward oral evaluations could create

more equitable and accessible assessment opportunities, especially for students who struggle with writing anxiety.

Stress Reduction Through Alternative Formats

A recurring motivation behind students' preference for alternative assessment methods was the desire to reduce exam-related stress and anxiety. Traditional written exams were frequently associated with fear, mental blocks, and emotional distress, which in turn affected performance. Many students argued that alternative formats such as presentations, projects, or continuous assessment would ease this emotional burden. One student commented,

"*In projects, I don't feel pressure. I can prepare slowly and do my best without fear,"* while another noted*, "Exams make me panic and forget everything. I prefer something that doesn't have too much stress."*

Several others shared that anxiety prevents them from showing what they truly know in a written format, and that alternative methods would allow for a calmer, more reflective learning experience. One participant stated,

"During exams, my brain shuts down. But in oral presentations or group work, I feel more relaxed and can speak freely."

These responses reinforce the idea that alternative assessment formats can serve as an emotional equaliser, giving students a chance to succeed without the intense time constraints and psychological pressure that often characterise traditional tests.

Real-World Application and Practical Skills

Another compelling reason students cited in favour of alternative assessment methods was their belief that these formats reflect real-world tasks and practical skills more accurately than

standard exams. Several students expressed that projects, presentations, or fieldwork are more useful for their future careers and life outside the classroom. One learner wrote,

"In real life, we don't write exams we do tasks, solve problems, and talk to people. I want exams to be like that."

Another student stated,

"I prefer doing something practical like a project or a simulation. That helps me learn and remember better."

These answers suggest that students see alternative assessments as more meaningful because they mirror how knowledge is applied in everyday situations. For example, writing a research paper, preparing a report, or giving a presentation not only develops academic skills but also communication, collaboration, and time management skills that traditional exams rarely cultivate. One student added,

"I learn more when I do a real task, not just answer questions in a paper,"

showing that practical, hands-on activities engage deeper learning processes. This sub-theme highlights that students are increasingly aware of the gap between academic assessments and real-world expectations, and are advocating for more relevant, skill-based evaluations.

Individual vs. Collaborative Assessment

In addition to assessment formats, students also commented on how they prefer to be assessed individually or as part of a group. While preferences varied, several students favoured collaborative assessments, such as group projects or peer-based tasks, because they promote shared learning, creativity, and mutual support. One student shared,

"I like working in groups because I learn from others and we help each other,"

while another reflected,

"Group projects make me feel less alone and we divide the work, so it's easier."

These responses indicate that some students find comfort and strength in peer interaction, especially when tackling challenging academic tasks. Others, however, preferred individual assessments to avoid dependency or unfair group dynamics. One student wrote,

"*I prefer individual work so I can show what I know without being affected by others,"*

and another added,

"Sometimes in group work, only one person does the job. I prefer to be responsible for myself."

These perspectives show a need for balanced assessment design ones that allow for both teamwork and personal accountability, so students with different strengths and preferences can all thrive.

Creativity and Personal Expression in Evaluation

many students expressed a desire for assessment formats that allow for creativity, personality, and self-expression, which they feel are lacking in traditional written exams. Several responses showed frustration with exams that require memorisation and standardised answers, as opposed to tasks that invite original thinking and personal voice. One student wrote,

"I like doing creative things like posters, stories, or videos. I feel more alive than when I write exams,"

highlighting the joy and engagement that comes from personalised work. Another said, *"When I have the chance to express my ideas in my own way, I feel more motivated,"*

which reflects the intrinsic value students place on being seen and heard as individuals. Creative assessments such as portfolios, reflective journals, or multimedia projects allow

students to demonstrate their understanding through different modes visual, written, spoken, or digital enhancing inclusivity and tapping into varied talents. One student added,

"Every student is different. Some are good at writing, others at speaking or creating. Why should exams be only one way?"

This sub-theme underscores a growing demand for diverse, student-centred assessments that celebrate individual expression and provide multiple pathways to success.

Discussion of the Results and Findings

The purpose of this study was to comprehensively investigate the diverse reasons of mental blocks experienced by first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students during university examinations, as well as to gather their thoughts on effective mitigation strategies. The findings, based mostly on a student questionnaire described in Chapter Three, provide a full comprehension of these academic issues. The discussion will look into the perceived variables that contribute to mental barriers, as well as the methods recommended by students for overcoming them, contextualizing these findings within the broader educational landscape.

The analysis of student perspectives suggests that mental blocks in EFL examinations are not monolithic, but rather occur due to a complex interaction of internal and external factors, which aligns with the study's goal of identifying these effects. Students at Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University commonly struggle with these disruptions, which are more than simply forgetfulness; they are generally caused by the intricate connections between language anxiety, self-perception, test pressure, and insufficient coping strategies..

Internal Psychological and Cognitive Factors

The findings strongly highlight that psychological disruptions particularly test anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation play a central role in students' experiences of mental blocks. Nearly 88% of respondents acknowledged feeling anxious before or during exams. This aligns with the findings of Horwitz et al. (1986), who established a strong connection between foreign language anxiety and inhibited performance, particularly during assessment. Similarly, the Attentional Control Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007) suggests that anxiety impairs the central executive system, reducing working memory, which our participants described as "mind blanks."

Students also expressed struggles with self-doubt and the fear of failure, which they described as emotional interference during writing tasks. These align with Schunk's (1984) theories on self-efficacy: when learners believe they are incapable, performance drops due to avoidance or disorganized effort. This was mirrored by students who stated, "I feel blocked even if I studied, I just forget everything," highlighting how negative beliefs directly sabotage cognitive access.

Language and Writing Barriers

Participants also pointed to linguistic demands particularly vocabulary recall and grammar use under time pressure as triggers for mental blocks. These findings reinforce those of Liu & Jackson (2008), who noted that EFL students often feel linguistically inadequate during oral or written tests due to lexical gaps and grammatical insecurity. The reported cognitive overload supports Sweller's (1994) Cognitive Load Theory, which states that multitasking linguistic and content knowledge under timed conditions results in reduced processing efficiency.

One student noted, “I keep thinking about grammar mistakes and then lose my ideas,” indicating that linguistic monitoring interrupts the writing flow. These observations are in line with the findings of Rassaei (2015), who emphasized that error anxiety often hampers fluency and coherence in EFL learners’ writing.

External Environmental Pressures

External pressures were equally influential. Students reported exam formats, time limits, and societal expectations as sources of stress. These findings align with those of Cassady and Johnson (2002), who found that unfamiliar assessment structures and time constraints significantly elevate anxiety and reduce performance in high-stakes environments.

Moreover, peer and family expectations were mentioned frequently, consistent with Dewaele & MacIntyre’s (2014) research showing that social pressures contribute to language anxiety and undermine learner confidence. One student said, “I’m afraid to disappoint my parents if I fail,” which reflects the internalization of performance-based self-worth, a recurring theme in exam stress literature.

Assessment Preferences and Student Motivation

The study also explored students’ preferences for assessment formats. Many respondents expressed a strong desire for more diverse and expressive methods, including creative tasks such as poster presentations, portfolios, or reflective writing. This echoes the work of Andrade & Du (2007), who advocated for alternative assessment in EFL to increase learner motivation and cater to different learning styles.

These preferences align with constructivist assessment theories, such as those by Shepard (2000), which promote learner-centered evaluation strategies. The students’ desire to “express my ideas in my own way” is a call for assessments that do not simply measure rote memory but allow for individuality and deeper processing elements that traditional exams often lack.

Coping Strategies and Student Recommendations

Students' suggested solutions for overcoming mental blocks included exam rehearsal, stress-reduction techniques, and supportive learning environments. These findings are consistent with Young (1991), who emphasized the importance of anxiety-reducing pedagogical strategies in language learning. Many students called for practice exams and gradual exposure to exam conditions, which reflect Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy development through mastery experiences.

Furthermore, the emphasis on teacher support and open dialogue resonates with Dörnyei's (2001) motivational strategies in the language classroom. Students reported feeling more confident when teachers provided "clear feedback" and reassurance a finding echoed in studies on formative assessment and student resilience (Carless, 2006).

Research limitations

Despite the significant efforts to develop an effective research methodology, it is essential to recognize several limitations that might have influenced the study's outcomes. First, the limited availability of previous research on mental blocks among EFL students during exams made it difficult to provide a complete review and contextual explanation of the findings. Second, because of time constraints, the study was limited to a single university and did not include responds from EFL students at other Algerian universities, which may have extended the data and allowed for more comprehensive comparisons.

Furthermore, the study included 82First year license students, which, while significant for descriptive research, may not accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of all EFL students at Algerian universities. Because the study is descriptive in nature and does not seek to generalize its findings, the small sample size and narrow focus might not capture the complexity and diversity of student experiences with examination-related mental blocks.

Furthermore, the study relied only on a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended items. While this approach provided useful insights, the lack of in-depth interviews or focus groups may have reduced the complexity and depth of the responses. Finally, some students may not have adequately articulated their opinions in writing, which could reduce the variety of the collected data.

Recognizing these constraints clarifies the study's scope and gives useful information for future researchers who want to investigate comparable concerns in broader or more diverse contexts.

Recommendations For Further research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the issue of EFL students' mental blocks during examinations at a particular Algerian university, some areas require more investigation. Future research should strive to include a larger and more diversified sample of participants from several Algerian universities in order to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of the occurrence across educational and regional contexts.

Furthermore, studies that include students from varied academic levels and cultural backgrounds may provide more thorough insights into the factors that contribute to mental barriers. It is also recommended that students investigate strategies for intervening and support mechanisms that can help them cope with test-related stress and anxiety, such as workshops on exam techniques, time management, and psychological assistance.

Finally, incorporating qualitative research methods such as interviews or focus groups into future studies may expand the data and provide a more nuanced picture of students' personal experiences and coping strategies.

Recommendations For Practice

Based on the findings, students provided significant insights into the causes of EFL students' mental blocks during examinations, and they provided practical solutions to the problem. Participants emphasized the need to create a friendly and low-stress environment for learning to help reduce anxiety and mental stress during examinations.

One essential recommendation is that teachers incorporate exam-taking skills and stress-management approaches into their daily teaching activities. This could include activities like time management training, practice exams, relaxation exercises, and boosting students' confidence with positive reinforcement and constructive feedback.

Teachers also proposed giving students additional exam-like experience during the semester to assist them grow more comfortable with the format and pressure of timed exams. Providing clear instructions, setting realistic goals, and progressively increasing task difficulty might help students develop coping mechanisms and enhance their performance under stress.

Furthermore, incorporating psychological assistance through collaborating with counselors or providing training on controlling exam anxiety could be helpful. Teachers are expected to recognize indications of stress in their pupils and to maintain open communication, allowing students to express their problems and seek help.

Finally, creating a classroom culture that promotes effort, facilitates peer support, and normalizes the difficulties involved with language acquisition and evaluation might help to reduce feelings of isolation and fear during exams. Adopting a learner-centered strategy that emphasizes progress over perfection can also help students overcome mental blocks and boost their overall academic confidence.

Conclusion

Chapter Three presented and discussed the findings and outcomes from the student questionnaire. Following a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire data, the research findings revealed several key points about mental barriers among EFL students during exams.

The study found that mental blocks are a multifaceted phenomenon resulting from a complex interaction of psychological, cognitive, linguistic, environmental, and study habits. Students highlighted test anxiety, self-doubt, fear of negative evaluation, and the cognitive load imposed by linguistic and writing obstacles as major internal barriers. External factors such as high exam pressure, stringent time limits, and novel exam formats were identified as significant causes. Furthermore, students identified ineffective study practices, specifically a lack of consistent writing practice and emphasis on cramming, as exacerbates these mental barriers.

In response to these challenges, students provided valuable suggestions for overcoming mental blocks and increasing exam performance. They emphasized the importance of repetitive practice, rehearsal, and exam simulation in building confidence and reducing fear. Critically, there was a strong need to include alternative assessment methods that enable for more creative expression and various demonstrations of knowledge, rather than standard written tests. Students also emphasized the importance of a more helpful and less stressful learning environment, encouraging for strategies to manage stress and focusing on progress rather than perfection. While the discussion mostly focused on the causes and solutions for mental blocks, the identified elements indicate the intrinsic barriers that students experience in achieving optimal performance during examinations.

General Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the underlying reasons for the mental block experienced by EFL students during examinations, with a focus on first-year licence students at Mohammed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University. The study gathered valuable data representing students' perspectives and experiences using a descriptive quantitative research design based solely on a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. By addressing the research questions and objectives, the study provides valuable insights into the psychological and academic difficulties that EFL learners experience during exams. Furthermore, the findings provide practical advice for instructors, curriculum designers, and university stakeholders to help students overcome mental blocks and improve their exam performance.

The literature review chapter, which served as the theoretical foundation for this research, examined various concepts related to exam anxiety, cognitive and emotional obstacles in language learning, and the psychological challenges that EFL students address during examinations. It also examined past studies on mental obstacles in educational settings and revealed significant gaps in the present body of research . The second chapter outlined the study's methodology, including descriptive quantitative research design and the use of a structured questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions as the primary data collection tool. The numerical responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, while the qualitative responses were analyzed thematic analysis .

The findings were presented in Chapter three, with a summary of the questionnaire results followed by in-depth exploration of recurring themes identified from students' open-ended responses. The discussion section provided a comprehensive interpretation of the findings, highlighting the main psychological, academic, and environmental elements that contribute to mental blocks during exams. It also addressed students' coping strategies and suggested

potential solutions for reducing exam-related stress. The study concluded with an acknowledgment of its limitations and recommendations for future research in this area

To conclude, this study aimed to investigate the causes of EFL students' mental blocks during examinations. The data was gathered using a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The study revealed that many psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors contribute to mental barriers during exams. Although students made various suggestions to overcome these challenges, Thus, this study adds valuable insights to the Algerian EFL context by addressing a relatively overlooked aspect of language learning and assessment.

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Appendices :

Target Group: First-Year University Students of English

- I……, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my questionnaire responses within two weeks after submitting the questionnaire, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves completing a questionnaire about my experiences with English language examinations and any instances of experiencing a 'mental block' during those exams. This will include questions about my study habits, feelings towards exams, and strategies for coping with stress. The questionnaire will take approximately 30min .
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details in my responses which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I mention.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my questionnaire responses may be quoted .
- I understand that if I indicate in the questionnaire that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original questionnaire data will be retained

- I understand that a copy of my questionnaire responses in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained .
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- Researchers: Mekhalfia Ikram [ikram.mekhalfia@univ-bba.dz] Boutaghane Aicha [boutaghaneaicha02@gmail.com]. Potential Supervisor/Teacher: Dr. Douadi Fatima [douadifatimab@gmail.com]

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant: …….. .. Date: ……

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher: ……. ……Date: ……..

Purpose: A mental block is a temporary inability to recall information, concentrate, or think clearly, often caused by stress, anxiety, or pressure. During examinations, it can prevent students from accessing what they know, even if they have studied well. This questionnaire aims to identify the factors contributing to mental blocks among first-year EFL students during examinations. Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for academic research purposes.

Instructions:

- Please answer all questions honestly.

- For closed-ended questions, tick (✓) the option that best represents your experience.

- For open-ended questions, provide brief but detailed answers.

Section 1: Background Information

1. Have you ever experienced a mental block during an exam?

- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

2. If yes, how often do you experience mental blocks?

- [ ] Rarely

- [ ] Sometimes

- [ ] Often

- [ ] Always

Section 2: Psychological Factors

3**. What emotions do you experience during exams?**

- [ ] Nervousness

- [ ] Fear of failure

- [ ] Lack of confidence

- [ ] Confusion

- [ ] Other (please specify):

……

……

4. How does anxiety affect your ability to recall information during exams?

……

……

……..

Section 3: Cognitive and Linguistic Difficulties

5. Do you struggle with organising your thoughts when answering exam questions?

- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

6. Which aspects of exams are most difficult for you?

- [ ] Understanding the question

- [ ] Remembering the answer

- [ ] Writing responses clearly

- [ ] Managing time

- [ ] Other (please specify):

……

……

……..

7. **Do you think language difficulties contribute to your mental blocks?**

- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

8. **If yes, which language skills cause the most difficulty?**

- [ ] Vocabulary

- [ ] Grammar

- [ ] Sentence structure

- [ ] All of the above

Section 4: Exam Environment and External Stressors

9. Which factors in the exam environment increase your stress?

- [ ] Time pressure

- [ ] Strict invigilators

- [ ] Noise/distractions

- [ ] Unfamiliar question format

- [ ] Other (please specify):

……

……

…….

10. How does the pressure of high expectations from teachers, family, or peers affect your performance?

……

……

……..

…….

Section 5: Study Habits and Preparation Strategies

11. How do you usually prepare for exams?

- [ ] Cramming last-minute

- [ ] Regular study sessions

- [ ] Group study

- [ ] Practising past exams

- [ ] Other (please specify):

……

……

……

12. Do you believe your study habits contribute to mental blocks?

- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

13. If yes, what changes in your study habits could help improve your exam performance?

……

……

…….

14. What strategies do you use to manage exam anxiety?

……

……

……

15. How do you think improving your English proficiency could help reduce mental blocks?

……

……

……

16. Do you think exams should include alternative assessment methods (e.g., oral exams,projects)?

- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

17. If yes, which alternative assessment methods would you prefer? Why?

……

……

……..

الملخص

نظراً للمتطلبات المعرفية والعاطفية لتعلم اللغة، غالباً ما يعاني طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من عوائق ذهنية أثناء الامتحانات، مما يعيق قدرتهم على تذكر المعلومات والأداء بفعالية. يُعد تحديد الأسباب الكامنة وراء هذه العوائق الذهنية أمراً ضرورياً لتعزيز النتائج الأكاديمية للطلاب وسلامتهم النفسية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة الصعوبات المتعلقة بالامتحانات التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الأولى في برنامج الإجازة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة محمد البشير الإبراهيمي، باستخدام تصميم بحث وصفي كمي. جُمعت البيانات من خلال استبيان مُهيكل شمل أسئلة مغلقة ومفتوحة، وتم الحصول على إجابات من 82 طالباً. حُللت البيانات باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي لتحديد الأنماط كمياً، والتجميع الموضوعي لتلخيص الإجابات المفتوحة. كشفت النتائج عن العديد من العوامل المساهمة في العوائق الذهنية أثناء الامتحانات، بما في ذلك قلق الامتحان، والخوف من الرسوب، وضعف التحضير، وضعف الكفاءة اللغوية، والضغط الخارجي من المعلمين أو الأسرة. كما وُجد أن مشكلات إضافية مثل ضعف الثقة بالنفس، وضعف إدارة الوقت، وسوء تنظيم الامتحان تؤثر بشكل كبير على أداء الطلاب. تُسلّط الدراسة الضوء على أهمية تعزيز ممارسات التقييم الداعمة، وتحسين عادات الدراسة، ومعالجة التحديات العاطفية في بيئة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تُقدّم هذه النتائج رؤى قيّمة حول التحديات الأكاديمية التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الجزائريون، وتُقدّم توصيات تربوية للحدّ من العوائق الذهنية أثناء الامتحانات

الكلمات المفتاحية: العوائق الذهنية، قلق الامتحان، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية، المنهج المختلط، اللغة

*ملحق بالقرار رقم ....1082.... المؤرخ في ....27 ديسمبر
....
الذي يحدد القواعد المتعلقة بالوقاية من السرقة العلمية ومكافحتها

الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

مؤسسة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي:

نموذج التصريح الشرفي
الخاص بالالتزام بقواعد النزاهة العلمية لإنجاز بحث

أنا الممضي (ة) أسفله،

السيد (ة): بوطغان عائشة الصفة: طالبة........

الحامل(ة) لبطاقة التعريف الوطنية رقم: 117326919 والصادرة بتاريخ: 2020/01/29

والمكلف (ة) بإنجاز مذكرة ماستر، عنوانها:
Investigating the reasons behind EFL students' Mental Blocks during examinations the case study of first-year students at Mohammed EL-Bachir EL-Ibrahimi university.

أصرح بشرفي أني ألتزم بمراعاة المعايير العلمية والمنهجية ومعايير الأخلاقيات المهنية والنزاهة الأكاديمية المطلوبة في إنجاز البحث المذكور أعلاه.

التاريخ:

توقيع المعني(ة)

Boutaghan

2021.07.13

*الملحق بالقرار رقم ....1052.... المؤرخ في ..... 27 ديسمبر 2020
الذي يحدد القواعد المتعلقة بالوقاية من السرقة العلمية ومكافحتها

الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

مؤسسة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي:

نموذج التصريح الشرفي
الخاص بالالتزام بقواعد النزاهة العلمية لإنجاز بحث

أنا الممضي (ة) أسفله،

السيد (ة) مزالغة إكرام الصفة: ..طالبة.....

الحامل(ة) لبطاقة التعريف الوطنية رقم: 107333037 والصادرة بتاريخ: 2023/10/17

والمكلف (ة) بإنجاز مذكرة ماستر، عنوانها: Investigating The Reasons Behind EFL Student Mental Blocks During Examinations the case of first-year student at Mohamed EL Bachir EL Ibrahimi University

أصرح بشرفي أني ألتزم بمراعاة المعايير العلمية والمنهجية ومعايير الأخلاقيات المهنية والنزاهة الأكاديمية المطلوبة في إنجاز البحث المذكور أعلاه.

التاريخ:

تمت المصادقة على الإمضاء
السيد (ة) : .....
رقم ب.ت.و./ر.س. : .....
الصادرة بتاريخ : .....
بئر قاصد علي في : 13 2025
ع/رئيس المجلس رئيس المجلس الشعبي البلدي
و بتفويض منه
سنيم هاشمي

توقيع المعني(ة)