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# EXAMINATION RELATED FACTORS AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR: IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine some examination related factors as correlates of aggressive behaviors among undergraduates in University of Calabar. Three research objectives gave rise to three hypotheses that were used in the study. A correlational research design utilizing questionnaire termed "Examination-Related Factors and Aggressive Behaviors Questionnaire (ERFATQ)" adopting the modified Likert 4-point rating scales was used to collect data from 750 undergraduate 300 level students drawn from three faculties using simple and stratified sampling techniques. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the reliability, which yielded coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.79. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis (PPMC), tested at .05 level of significance. The analyses revealed that students who experienced poorly organized, stressful examination conditions as well as harsh or intimidating behaviour from invigilators were more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression. It was recommended amongst all that standards be raised by the university management in the areas of coordination of examinations in order to reduce aggressive behaviors in students.

**Keywords:** Examination related factors, aggressive behaviors, undergraduates', psychological intervention

## INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behaviors among university students have become a pressing issue in education, sociology, and psychology that needs our immediate focus, given its widespread nature. When we talk about aggressive behaviors, we are referring to those patterns of behavior or feelings of hostility that can lead to thoughts of violence. Aggressive behavior encompasses actions intended to harm or discomfort others, manifesting in both physical and emotional forms. In educational settings, aggression can appear as verbal insults, physical altercations, or more subtle behaviors like rumor-spreading. Various factors may drive students to exhibit aggression, including stress, frustration, or interpersonal conflicts with peers or teachers. Common examples include bullying, fighting during recess, and classroom disruptions. The presence of aggression in schools fosters a negative environment, hindering both aggressors and victims from effectively engaging in their studies and social interactions. Additionally, teachers may experience aggression from students, which can manifest as disrespect, verbal attacks, or defiance,

ultimately affecting classroom management and the overall well-being of educators. These behaviors often start as internal aggressive tendencies, which may manifest as irritability or conflicts, particularly in educational and family settings (Onukwufor, 2013; Lin, 2023).

Universities and other higher education institutions, as hubs of learning and social interaction, often see these aggressive behaviors on display, not just from students but also from faculty and staff. Bushman and Huesman (2010) define aggression as any behavior aimed at harming someone else who is trying to avoid that harm. Relatedly, the World Health Organization (2014) describes violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury or death." Also, Anderson and Bushman (2002) pointed out that violence is an extreme form of aggression that causes serious physical damage. As a psychological concept, aggression is subtle while violence is more in severity. Throughout this research, attention was focused on the aggressive behaviors or tendencies manifested by students as such these terms are commonly used where necessary in this research work.

Aggressive behaviors could be manifested in many forms as physical aggression, verbal aggression and relational or symbolic aggression. Physical aggression involves actions that cause harm to someone else for example, shooting, kicking, slapping, or stabbing. On the other hand, verbal aggression is all about using words to hurt others, which can include yelling or using abusive language. Then there's relational or symbolic aggression, often referred to as social aggression, which focuses on damaging someone's relationships. This can happen through spreading false rumors, avoiding people, holding grudges, or humiliating them (Allen & Anderson 2017).

In universities, students often find themselves engaging with their lecturers during lectures, while submitting assignments, or during examinations. In these situations, certain factors can trigger aggressive behaviors among students. These triggers might include unnecessary displays of authority from lecturers, the transfer of aggression from lecturers to students, or frustration felt by either party. Generally, university students aged 16 and older are biologically inclined to show aggressive behavior due to specific developmental changes (like hormonal shifts) happening in their bodies (Muammria & Mahee 2004). When these situations arise, it can lead to aggressive behaviors being displayed towards fellow students or even their lecturers.

Interestingly, this study has pinpointed examination periods as particularly sensitive times for heightened aggressive behaviors among students. Examination periods significantly heighten stress and anxiety levels among students, leading to increased cortisol production. This hormonal surge can impair cognitive functions and heighten emotional responses, occasionally resulting in aggressive behavior, as noted by Heissel, Adam, Figlio, Doleac and Meer (2019). Additionally, students encounter various academic pressures, including heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and high expectations, which can foster frustration. The frustration-aggression hypothesis suggests that such obstacles can trigger aggressive reactions when students struggle to meet their goals, as outlined by by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1933). Moreover, the examination environment plays a crucial role in student behavior. Factors such as noise, inadequate lighting, and uncomfortable seating arrangements can exacerbate feelings of irritability and aggression, as highlighted by Falla (2023).

Examinations are a vital way to assess students' academic performance, so they carry a lot of weight and pressure. Examinations are a key way to assess how well students are doing academically. Because of this, they hold a lot of weight in predicting students' future success. Students know this too, which is why they often skip classes but still show up for examinations, even if they are not fully prepared. Unfortunately, this can lead to some pretty aggressive behavior. In moments of stress, students might lash out verbally or physically at their lecturers, damage personal belongings, or even vandalize university properties. There have been alarming instances where students have threatened their lecturers with weapons or resorted to blackmail to get their way during examination supervision, all in an effort to cheat. Other factors like social

trends, corrupt and disruptive invigilators, and the fear of failing can all fuel this kind of unwarranted aggression among students.

Take the University of Calabar, Nigeria, for example, where headlines like "UNICAL Examination Day disaster: injuries, lost valuables" captured the chaos of an examination gone wrong on August 7th, 2023 ([www.nairaland.com](http://www.nairaland.com)). Another incident on January 9th, 2023, titled "Final year students protest, disrupt examinations over inability to register," shows that this is not just a one-off issue ([www.crossriverwatch.com](http://www.crossriverwatch.com)). Other universities have their own stories too. A particularly troubling event occurred on June 18th, 2007, when students from Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education stormed the examination halls, forcibly preventing their peers from taking the first semester examination, attacking lecturers, and vandalizing college property (COEASU in Olujuwon 2007). Sadly, these kinds of situations keep happening during certain examination periods and the researchers deem it fit to investigate if these recurring cases of aggression could be triggered or explained by certain examination related factors.

It is clear that aggressive behaviors can be understood through a variety of theoretical lenses. For this paper, we are focusing on the Frustration Aggression theory put forth by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears (1939). These theorists argue that when people face frustration, they often feel the urge to lash out at others. Morris (1990), as cited in Qaisy (2014), pinpointed five main sources of frustration: delays, failures, lack of resources, losses, and discrimination. When their goals are blocked, individuals can become extremely angry, sometimes even irrationally so. This frustration can arise from a range of issues, such as inadequate accommodation, poor transportation options, subpar nutrition (especially for students in boarding facilities), student union elections, and conflicts between rival secret cult groups on campus. It can also be linked to challenging examination conditions, like not having enough examination venues, uncomfortable seating, late examination times, poor lighting, unpredictable schedules, and clashes in course timings on the examination timetable, as well as a lack of preparation for the examinations. Other factors such as missed registration deadlines, portal issues, unpaid fees, program withdrawals, uncertain graduation timelines, unaccredited courses, multiple carry-overs, etc contribute to student aggression. A thorough literature review on examination related factors and students' aggressive behaviors in Nigeria and globally has been conducted. Studies on academic stress, psychological responses, particularly in relation to examination factors, are pertinent to understanding this behavior. While direct research from the University of Calabar is limited, relevant findings from other universities offer valuable insights into these issues.

A study conducted by Jiang, Zhang, and Wang (2020) investigated the impact of chaotic exam environments on student stress and aggression. The researchers aimed to establish a connection between disorganized exam settings and students' emotional and behavioral responses. Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, they surveyed 300 students selected through stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across various academic fields. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) were employed as measurement tools. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, revealing that disorganized exam conditions significantly increased stress levels, which subsequently led to heightened aggression among students. Factors such as inadequate seating, poor lighting, and noise were identified as contributors to a stressful exam environment, resulting in negative emotional and behavioral outcomes.

Also, Ajayi (2020) investigated the impact of examination stress on the blood pressure of secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the research found that examination-related stress significantly elevated blood pressure, indicating a physiological response to academic pressure. In a separate study by Zhang and Liu (2021), the focus shifted to the effects of unclear examination guidelines on student behavior, particularly regarding classroom management. The researchers hypothesized that vague instructions would elevate anxiety levels and provoke disruptive behavior during tests. Conducted in a secondary school context, this mixed-methods study combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive data set. The sample consisted of 300 students selected

from a larger pool of 1,500 using stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse representation of academic performance levels. The findings underscored the importance of clear examination guidelines in mitigating anxiety and promoting positive student engagement and behavior during assessments.

Similarly, Fasoro (2019) focused on the perceived stress and stressors among first-year university students in Nigeria. The study, which involved 500 participants from various institutions, identified academic workload and the transition to university life as primary stressors, with variations noted across different fields of study. Admittedly, academic workload mentioned by the researchers include examination related stress emanating from examination factors investigated in this study. Also, Qaisy (2014) conducted a study to evaluate the level of aggressive behavior among university students, using an analytical descriptive design. A total of 690 students were selected from five colleges within the university, employing a stratified random sampling technique based on age and college affiliation. The researcher created a self-constructed questionnaire, and the results revealed that frustration triggers more aggressive behaviors in male students than female students, often directing their aggression towards fellow students, university staff, and even university property.

Reed, Turner, and Cook (2021) investigated the connection between stress and aggression in poorly controlled exam environments, focusing on how chaotic conditions affect student behavior. Their research aimed to determine whether inadequate exam settings led to heightened stress and subsequent aggressive behaviors. The study hypothesized that students in disorganized exam situations would exhibit greater stress and aggression compared to those in well-structured environments. Conducted in a secondary school with a sample of 250 students selected through stratified random sampling, the research employed quantitative methods, including surveys and behavioral observations, and utilized statistical analyses such as t-tests and ANOVA. The findings indicated that students in poorly managed exam environments experienced significantly higher stress levels, which correlated with increased aggression during and after exams.

Brown and Peterson (2020) explored the relationship between exam stress and aggression in students, aiming to understand how academic assessment stress influences aggressive behaviors. They posed critical questions regarding the extent to which exam stress contributes to aggression and whether specific student demographics are more vulnerable to this effect. Conducted in a university setting, the study utilized a correlational research design and relied on self-reported measures for data collection. The researchers concluded that higher levels of exam stress would be associated with increased aggression, with variations among different student groups.

The research conducted by Morales and Scott (2021) investigated the impact of invigilator behavior on student aggression during exams. Their findings indicated that students who perceived invigilators as unfair or excessively strict exhibited higher levels of aggression. The study, which involved a quantitative, cross-sectional approach with a sample of 500 randomly selected students, utilized a structured questionnaire for data collection. Analysis through descriptive statistics and regression revealed a strong correlation between perceived severity of invigilator behavior and student aggression.

In a separate study by Wang, Xie, and Li (2020), the focus was on the effects of mistreatment by authority figures on exam-related stress and aggression among students. Conducted across multiple educational institutions in China, this research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with a sample of 1,200 students selected through stratified sampling. The researchers applied statistical analyses, including structural equation modeling, to validate their hypotheses. The results confirmed that mistreatment by authority figures exacerbated the relationship between exam stress and student aggression.

Agreeably, the reviewed studies pointed to some examination related indicators that impact aggressive behavior but did not specifically dwell on all the proposed variables collectively as considered in this present study. Noteworthy, some of the reviewed studies were on secondary

school students and mentions the impact of stress during examination period suggestive that the present study is actually worth undertaking to find out those examination factors that are related to aggressive behaviors among students in tertiary institutions. This study sought to investigate examination related factors (situations or circumstances) that are related to aggressive behaviors among undergraduate of University of Calabar. These examination related factors are subdivided into three sub-variables -1) Organizing examinations (unpredictable examination timetable, insufficient time to prepare for examination, issues of course(s) registration) (2) Examination conditions (Insufficient venues for examination, poor lightings and ventilation in examination venue, poor seating arrangements) and (3) Harassment from invigilators (Distraction from invigilators, undue punishment/intimidation, reduction of stipulated exam period). The following research objectives gave rise to these hypotheses used in the study:

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To determine the relationship between organization of examination and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.
2. To examine the relationship between examination conditions and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.
3. To find out the relationship between harassment from invigilators and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant relationship between organization of examination and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.
2. There is no significant relationship between examination conditions and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.
3. There is no significant relationship between harassment from invigilators and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduate students in University of Calabar.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to establish the relationship between examination-related factors and the aggressive behaviors among undergraduates. The study was conducted in University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of 300-level undergraduate students in the 15 faculties of University of Calabar is 15,032 for the 2023/2024 academic session (Students' Affairs Department of University of Calabar). Simple and stratified random sampling technique was applied, and three faculties were selected, representing 20% of the 15 faculties. A sample of 750 respondents was drawn from the population of 15,032, representing 5% of 300-level undergraduate students from the three selected faculties. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire, termed "Examination-Related Factors and Aggressive Behaviors Questionnaire (ERFATQ)". The questionnaire was categorized into sections A and B. Section A was used to measure examination-related factors such as organization of examination, Examination conditions, and Harassment from invigilators, while section B was used to measure aggressive behaviors such as physical, verbal, and relational aggression. The instrument was structured using the modified Likert 4-point rating scales, ranging from strongly agree (SA = 4) to strongly disagree (SD = 1). Experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation validated the instruments for content and face validity. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the reliability, which yielded coefficients ranging

from 0.71 to 0.79. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis (PPMC), tested at .05 level of significance. This test statistic was considered appropriate as it measured the relationship between examination-related factors and the aggressive behaviors among undergraduates.

## RESULTS

### Hypothesis one

The hypothesis posited that there is no significant relationship between the organization of examinations and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduates at the University of Calabar.

TABLE 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between organization of examination and aggressive behaviors (N=750)

\* Significant at .05, p-value=.000, df = 748

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
organization of examination	24.17	2.76		
Physical aggression	13.76	2.55	-.657*	.000
Verbal aggression	14.71	2.76	-.592*	.000
Relational aggression	14.42	2.15	-.509*	.000

To test this hypothesis, the relationship between the organization of examinations and aggressive behaviors, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression, was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The results are presented in Table 1. The Pearson correlation coefficients for physical aggression (-.657), verbal aggression (-.592), and relational aggression (-.509) were all significant at the 0.05 level, with corresponding p-values of 0.000 and 748 degrees of freedom. Since the p-values are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which proposed no significant relationship between the organization of examinations and students' aggressive behaviors, was rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative correlation between the organization of examinations and aggressive behaviors among students. Specifically, the higher the level of organization in examinations, the lower the likelihood of students exhibiting physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Conversely, poorly organized examinations may contribute to increased aggressive behaviour in students.

### Hypothesis two

The hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between examination conditions and aggressive behaviors, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduates in University of Calabar.

TABLE 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between examination conditions and aggressive behaviors (N= 750)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
Examination conditions	25.58	2.92		
Physical aggression	13.76	2.55	-.657*	.000
Verbal aggression	14.71	2.76	-.592*	.000
Relational aggression	14.42	2.15	-.509*	.000

\* Significant at .05, p-value=.000, df = 748

To test this hypothesis, the relationship between examination conditions and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. The Pearson correlation coefficients for physical aggression (-.657), verbal aggression (-.592), and relational aggression (-.509) were all found to be significant at the 0.05 level, with a p-value of 0.000 and 748 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between examination conditions and students' aggressive behaviour, was rejected. This result indicates that examination conditions are significantly related to aggressive behaviors among students in University of Calabar. The negative correlations suggest that better examination conditions are associated with a lower likelihood of students engaging in physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Conversely, poor examination conditions tend to correlate with higher levels of aggressive behaviour among students.

### Hypothesis three

The hypothesis proposed that there is no significant relationship between harassment from invigilators and aggressive behaviors, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression among undergraduates at the University of Calabar.

TABLE 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between harassment from invigilators and aggressive behaviors (N= 750)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
Harassment from invigilators	23.55	2.47		
Physical aggression	13.76	2.55	.682*	.000
Verbal aggression	14.71	2.76	.547*	.000
Relational aggression	14.42	2.15	.538*	.000

\* Significant at .05, p-value=.000, df = 748

To test this hypothesis, the relationship between harassment from invigilators and aggressive behaviors in terms of physical, verbal, and relational aggression was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The results are presented in Table 3. The Pearson correlation coefficients for physical aggression (0.682), verbal aggression (0.547), and relational aggression (0.538) were all found to be significant at the 0.05 level, with a p-value of 0.000 and 748 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between harassment from invigilators and students' aggressive behaviour, was rejected. This result indicates that harassment from invigilators is significantly related to aggressive behaviors among students in University of Calabar. The positive correlations suggest that higher levels of harassment from invigilators are associated with higher levels of physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Conversely, lower levels of harassment from invigilators tend to correlate with lower levels of aggressive behaviour among students.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of hypothesis one revealed a significant negative correlation between the organization of examinations and aggressive behaviors among students, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression. The results suggest that well-organized examinations are associated with lower levels of aggression among students. The higher the level of organization in examination procedures, such as clear communication, structured timing, and fair invigilation, the less likely students are to exhibit aggressive behaviours. Conversely, poorly organized examinations (unpredictable examination timetable, insufficient time to prepare for examination, issues of course(s) registration) may trigger frustration, anxiety, and conflict, which could escalate into aggressive actions.

The findings are supported by the Frustration-Aggression Theory, which posits that frustration caused by unmet expectations or obstacles leads to aggressive behaviour. When students experience disorganization during examinations, their frustration levels rise, which may contribute to increased aggression. This finding is also supported by the submissions made by Jiang et al. (2020), who found that students in poorly organized exam settings reported higher levels of stress and anxiety, which, in turn, led to more aggressive behaviours. Similarly, Zhang and Liu (2021) demonstrated that students who faced unclear guidelines and erratic exam procedures were more likely to engage in disruptive behaviours, further supporting the current finding that poorly organized examinations can result in aggressive behaviors.

The findings of hypothesis two revealed that examination conditions are significantly related to aggressive behaviors among students at the University of Calabar. Specifically, the results indicated that students who experienced poor or stressful examination conditions were more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression. This result is not surprising as students with limited examination venues may end up struggling during examination periods for seats. Time table clashing, and other poor examination conditions such as poor lighting and ventilation could subject these ones to unwarranted stress, which could inadvertently result in frustration and aggressive reactions. This finding highlights the role that the environment in which examinations take place can have on students' behaviour, with negative conditions potentially leading to increased frustration and aggression.

Supporting studies such as those by Reed, Turner and Cook (2021) found that students in poorly controlled testing environments exhibited higher levels of anxiety and aggression. Similarly, Brown and Peterson (2020) found that stress from examination-related issues led to significant behavioural issues, including verbal and physical aggression. These studies align with the present study's conclusion that poor examination conditions environments are linked to more aggressive behaviours and vice versa. These findings also resonate with other studies, such as that by Ajayi (2020); Fasoro (2019) who associated aggressive behaviors with examination related stress emanating from examination factors. This suggests that aggressive behaviors might be triggered by students' views on certain stressors or frustrations that are not adequately addressed within the school system. Poor examination conditions can be seen as a threat, leading to negative emotional responses, such as anger or aggression. Students who are unable to cope effectively with stress due to poor examination conditions may resort to aggressive behaviours.

The findings of hypothesis three revealed that harassment from invigilators is significantly related to aggressive behaviors among students at the University of Calabar. The analysis revealed that students who experienced harsh or intimidating behaviour from invigilators were more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression. This result underscores the significant impact that invigilators' behaviour can have on students' emotional responses and overall behaviour during examinations. This finding aligns with the Frustration-Aggression theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears 1939) that frustration caused by perceived injustice or unfair treatment can lead to aggressive responses. Similarly, a study by Morales and Scott (2021) found that students subjected to rude or unprofessional behaviour from invigilators exhibited higher levels of aggression and disruptive behaviour during exams. These studies corroborate the present finding that harassment from invigilators is strongly related to aggressive behaviors among students.

### **Implications for Psychological Interventions**

Psychological interventions designed to address aggressive behaviors associated with exams focus on stress reduction and effective emotional management. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is instrumental in helping students transform negative thoughts into positive ones, fostering a healthier mindset. Additionally, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation are effective in alleviating physical tension and anxiety. Mindfulness training enhances self-awareness and emotional regulation, enabling students to maintain composure in high-pressure situations. Anger management strategies are also crucial,

as they equip students with the skills to identify triggers and control impulsive reactions. Furthermore, fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment is essential, as it encourages open dialogue, allowing students to voice their concerns and mitigate feelings of frustration.

### **Conclusion**

The study conducted at the University of Calabar identified a significant negative correlation between the coordination of exams and the aggressive behaviors exhibited by students, which encompass physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Furthermore, the research highlighted a strong association between harassment from invigilators and the prevalence of aggressive behaviors among students. These findings underscore the impact of exam coordination, conditions and invigilator conduct on student behavior, suggesting that improvements in these areas could potentially reduce aggression in academic settings.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions discussed herein, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The school administration must enhance its coordination of exams by establishing a clear and organized timetable, allowing adequate preparation time for students, and promptly addressing any course registration issues.
- ii. Additionally, universities should consider constructing more comfortable examination halls to alleviate stress and prevent aggressive behaviors that may arise from overcrowding.
- iii. Implementing policies that train invigilators in supportive practices is essential for fostering a positive exam environment.

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